

Lilith

Independent, Jewish & frankly feminist

ODDISH DIVAS TAKE THE STAGE

WOMEN AND SUPPRESSION

Confronting Gender Dynamics
in the Ultra-Orthodox World

UNDAINED

Women Rabbis
Shake Their Minds

TRUISM MERGES

How Three Grieving
Widows Became
Activists

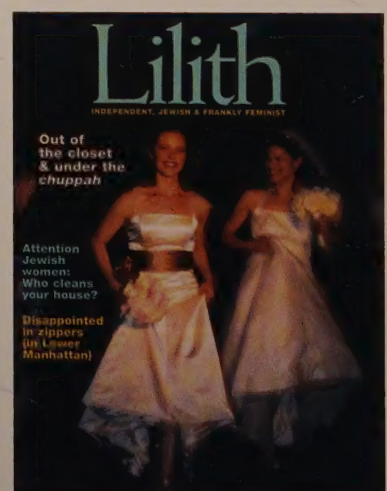
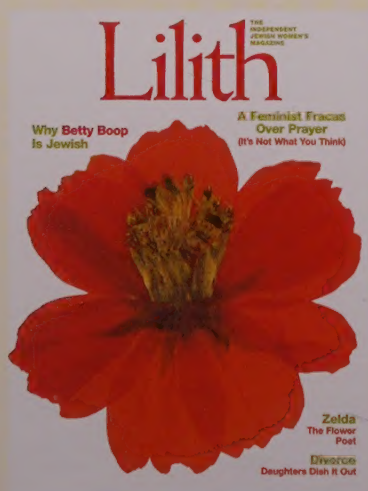
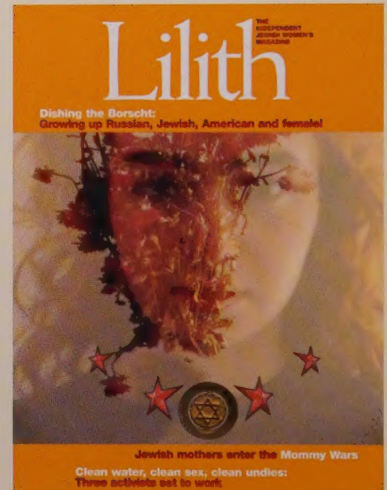
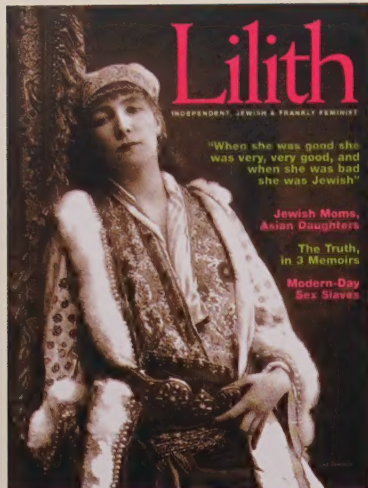
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Lilith back issues

independent, Jewish & frankly feminist



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About *Lilith*: In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."
—The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

IO Sex and Suppression in the Ultra-Orthodox Community

by Hella Winston

The author examines communities where women and men must walk on separate sides of the street, where long aprons for maids are required, and where underground struggles over allegations of abuse are causing explosive turmoil.

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Cover: Mina Bern. Photo by Joan Roth, 2004. (Also pictured above middle)

The importance of the back story

You're holding in your hands a magazine with an unusual mix of stories. Among other things: a retrospective glance cast by the pioneering first generation of female Reform rabbis, and a preview of a work-in-progress—a

cartoon novel about another kind of pioneer, a Jewish abortionist and “women’s doctor” on New York’s Lower East Side in the early years of the last century.

But one of the most profoundly stirring of the articles in this issue is the one about bereaved mothers, women whose losses have become the engine driving them to help improve the world a little for other people’s children. As I was reading one of the conversations Susan Schnur had with the women profiled here, I was visited by the lines from a Marge Piercy poem, “The Art of Blessing the Day.” Piercy writes: “What we want to change we curse and then/ pick up a tool. Bless whatever you can/ with eyes and hands and tongue. If you/ can’t bless it, get ready to make it new.” These women manage to do this, making something new, and necessary, which keeps alive the spirit of their children.

How does a report like this come into being? Like a lot of the unique reporting you read in *Lilith*, this section started out as a conversation around the *Lilith* conference table, where the *Lilith* staff (and the occasional visitor) sits to mull over a subject one of us has brought to the table—literally. I’d known a little about the work of all three women—and of some others like them, as I imagine many of you do too—and realized that I wanted to try to understand what enabled them—drove them, really—to decide to improve the world rather than staying in bed forever. How were they able to face each day after a child had died? And how were they able to find such a storehouse of forgiving energy within themselves to do good for other people’s children, rather than feeling angry at the universe? We learn an enormous amount when we ask how something gets to be what it is. Too often women credit chance for our accomplishments, or for setting us on the paths we take, but here are three women who are very clear about the events—nightmarish, unwelcome events—which spurred them to create change.

We learn from what is sometimes casually called the “back story.” And the back story can become an example, or can show us alternatives. After this section was edited, I sat in an audience watching excerpts from a still-unfinished documentary about white resistance to apartheid in South Africa (“Breaking the Rules,” Carolyn Projansky and Susan Barocas, producers). I asked the filmmakers whether they would explore how these uncommon white agitators for racial equality in South Africa became who they were—

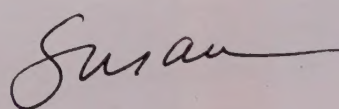
Helen Suzman, the Jewish anti-apartheid liberal parliamentarian, among them. When the others nodded as I asked about what I wanted to know, I perceived again how hungry we all are to learn (well, learn and try to understand) the “why” behind the actions people take.

Talking; talking back; talking up. For several years *Lilith* has been available on tape for people who have limited vision. Now you can download *Lilith* podcasts, the talking versions of select current *Lilith* articles, and even some pieces from back issues. Talking *Lilith* is a boon both for those unable to read the print magazine and for people who want to listen to *Lilith*’s articles while driving, running, skating, cooking, and who knows what else. You can check out our podcasts at Lilith.org. and do the mitzvah of assisting others by letting anyone you know who has difficulty seeing that she can listen to some of *Lilith* right now.

And you can even talk back. On the website you’ll see our blogs, some written in response to *Lilith* articles, some on other subjects our authors and others want to explore on *Lilith.org*. If you’re moved by something in the magazine, send us a letter or an email. Or add your voice to the *Lilith* blog presence.

Talking up? Maybe you do it a lot. *Lilith* writers do. In print and on the Web, *Lilith* amplifies their voices and the voices of women like—and unlike—you.

Here’s to provocative reading and talking.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

Therapy?

We all know that Jewish women are over-represented in the psychotherapy ranks, both as clinicians and as patients/clients. For a set of amusing, idiosyncratic, anecdotal, data-enriched, gimlet-eyed stories about Jewish&female shrinks and/or clients, we’d love to get some leads from you. We don’t want to breach confidentiality, but . . . do you have a funny story about being a Jewish&female shrink? A Jewish&female client? Did you two ever collude in not talking about something? Do you know that store in L.A. that sells clothes only to Jewish&female therapists? Did your Jewish&female shrink end up, shockingly, marrying your brother? You get it . . . For an upcoming article in *Lilith*, email Submissions@Lilith.org.

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Newstand price: \$4.95 Canada: \$6.95
Individual subscriptions: \$24.97/4 issues
Institutions: \$30/4 issues Canada: add \$6/year
Overseas: add \$8/year (U.S. funds only)
Single copies: \$7, prepaid (includes postage)

Change of address or delivery problems:
Send label to Lilith, Dept. LIL, P.O. Box 3000, Denville,
NJ 07834, or call (800) 783-4903 or (212) 757-0818.

Retailers: To carry Lilith, call (888) 254-5484
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organization. Copyright © Lilith Publications, Inc. 2006.
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Conventions. Associate member American Jewish Press
Association. Available from University Microfilms International
and on tape from the Jewish Braille Institute of America.
ISSN 0146-2334. Lilith occasionally makes its mailing list
available to organizations or publishers. If you do not want
to receive such mail, please send label and request to:
Lilith, Dept. LIL, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834.

Printed in Canada

Thanks to these generous people for contributions to Lilith magazine
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Hilda Terry, 1914–2006

Pioneer cartoonist **Hilda Terry** died at her computer on Friday the 13th of October, 2006. She was 92 years old. Terry was given to darkly connected dates. Born Hyuda Tryna Fellman on the day of the “Great Salem Fire,” when half of Salem, Massachusetts burned down, Terry believed that in a former life she had been Dorcas Good, a child imprisoned along with her mother on charges of witchcraft, in 17th century Salem. Was the Salem conflagration some ghostly revenge on the part of the reincarnated Dorcas?

Teenage Terry ran away from home to become an artist in New York. She found waitress work at Schrafft’s restaurant for three dollars a week, and shared a room and bed with a young African-American woman in a Harlem boarding house. She attended the Art Students’ League, where she met teacher and cartoonist **Gregory D’Alessio**, marrying him, as she put it, “for his mother’s cooking.” The couple’s Manhattan home became a salon, where they welcomed the likes of **Andres Segovia** and **Carl Sandburg**, and where they drew cartoons; he for the *New Yorker* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, she for *American Magazine*.

William Randolph Hearst saw her *American Magazine* cartoon, *Carrots O’Hara*, and telegraphed his newspaper syndicate: “Get Hilda Terry.” “*Teena*,” the strip that Terry drew for Hearst’s syndicate, debuted on another dark day: December 7, 1941. The skinny, long-legged teenage heroine of the strip survived the war and charmed American newspaper readers until 1964.

When *Teena* ended, Terry, 50 years old and unemployed, picked herself up, dusted herself off, and became another pioneer, this time in computer animation. She traveled with baseball teams and animated their electronic scoreboards all over the country. In 1979, Terry’s computer animation work won her the Animator of the Year award from the National Cartoonists



“Teena,” circa 1955, Courtesy 8 Henderson Place Foundation.

Society. Ironic, as the prestigious cartoonists organization had rejected Terry’s bid for membership back in 1949, when they were an all-male group. Signing herself “Temporary Chairwoman” of “The Committee for Women Cartoonists,” Terry sent them a letter saying, in part:

“...While we would ...like to continue...the indulgence of your masculine whim, we find that the cost of your stag privileges is stagnation for us, professionally.... Therefore...we most humbly request that you either alter your title to the National

Men Cartoonist Society...or discontinue... whatever rule...you have which bars otherwise qualified women cartoonists to membership for purely sexual reasons.”

While there were indeed some clowns in the NCS who suggested they let the women in “for purely sexual reasons,” the end result was that Terry was accepted into the organization and immediately nominated her women cartoonist friends for membership, thus breaking the gender barrier.

—Trina Robbins

Giving Rabbis the Words to Talk About Abuse

Several Jewish organizations are now reaching out to rabbis as first responders on abuse issues. Rabbis, often the people who are in a position to notice abuse in families or individuals, or to hear about it from witnesses or victims, may not have either the training or the tools to help them make appropriate referrals. *Miklat* (shelter), an Israeli organization that maintains women's shelters in Israel and supplies legal aid to women in need, asserted at a conference last year in New York that the key to ending domestic abuse in the Jewish community is the education of rabbis. In the past, Miklat leaders and others point out, abused women and children did not speak of their suffering for fear of not being believed; "Jewish men don't beat their wives," was

the dominant and damaging myth. And some rabbis have encouraged women to return to their abusive homes to try to figure out what they themselves are doing wrong, in the name of *shalom bayit*, peace in the home.

Recent initiatives to educate rabbis and give them the necessary language to talk about domestic abuse come from New York UJA-Federation's Task Force on Family Violence, and from *Sh'ma Kolenu* (lit. Hear our Voices), a program of the New York Board of Rabbis and Jewish Women International. The UJA-Federation task force has just released a large laminated "Reference Card for Rabbis." It says, in part: "You are uniquely positioned to change community attitudes such as denial or refusal

of responsibility or blaming the victim or maintaining the status quo."

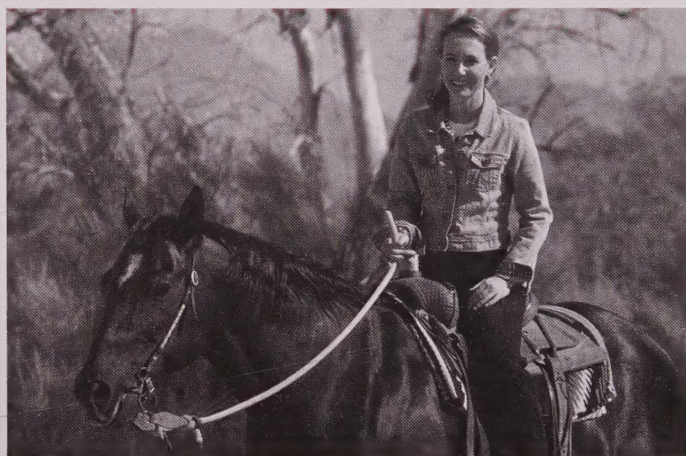
A Miklat pamphlet reaching out to rabbis and religious leaders quotes from the *Sefer HaBrit*, where in 1797 Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu of Vilna said that for afflicting physical harm on a family member "their punishment is stricter and their behavior is more disgusting, because she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and he cruelly oppresses his close relative. And it is forbidden to afflict one's wife verbally, and certainly it is forbidden to raise one's hand against her, G-d forbid!"

—Julia Frankston-Morris

See the reference card at www.Lilith.org

Mazal Tov! 9 Jewish Women in U.S. Congress:

In the Senate, **Diane Feinstein** (D-California). In the House of Representatives: **Jane Berkley** (D-Nevada); **Susan Davis** (D-California); **Jane Harman** (D-California); **Nita Lowey** (D-New York); **Jan Schakowsky** (D-Illinois); **Allyson Schwartz** (D-Pennsylvania); **Debbie Wasserman Schultz** (D-Florida). And a special mazal tov to **Gabrielle Giffords** (D), the newly elected Representative from Arizona! "In my family, if you want to get something done you take it to the Jewish women relatives," Giffords told the JTA in October. "Jewish women, by and large, know how to get things done."



Gabrielle Giffords

Giffords for Congress

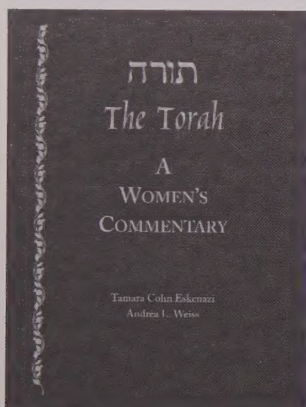
How deep in a woman's mouth and how long should his tongue, in this case allegedly belonging to Justice Minister Haim Ramon, be in order to consider it a sexual offense?...It is sad and frustrating to still have to answer to women who themselves claim to be feminists. 'Have you gone too far?' they ask me. After all, they say, he is the president, or the minister, or the general, and she is just a female assistant, or a girl soldier, or a woman."

Yael Dayan, deputy mayor of Tel Aviv, writing in the *Forward* newspaper, September 29, 2006

“Waiting for This Book All My Life”

Women of Reform Judaism are remaking Torah study in their own image. A chapter of *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, went into circulation in November, ahead even of the official release of the whole project, and thousands of Jews in congregations across North America learned together in November from the Torah portion Chayei Sarah. The entire *Women's Commentary*, with writings by major female rabbis and scholars in several fields, including **Dr. Judith Baskin**, **Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell** and **Dr. Rachel Adler**, is slated for release in 2007.

And while this edition of the five books of the Bible may concern itself with recognizing and including women's scholarship, it is intended as a resource for all Jews.



Shelley Lindauer, executive director of WRJ, the sisterhood arm of the Reform movement, told Lilith that her office has already received more than a thousand emails praising the project. “Your news should remind the Jewish community how dramatic women’s advances in scholarship and education have been in ‘only’ three decades,” reads one. Another says, “I am 80 years old and I have been waiting for this book all my life.”

—**Melanie Weiss**

“It has only been in the last century that Americans have put all their emotional eggs in the basket of coupled love. Because of this change many of us have found great joys in marriage our great-great-grandparents never did. But we have also neglected our other relationships, placing too many burdens on a fragile institution and making social life poorer in the process.”

From “Too Close For Comfort” by **Stephanie Coontz**, New York Times, November 7, 2006

“Laws dating from Jordanian and Egyptian administration in the West bank and the Gaza strip, respectively, do not fully protect the rights of women, the report [‘A Question of Security: Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls’, written by Lucy Mair and Farida Deif for Human Rights Watch] says. It notes, for example, that the laws provide reduced penalties to men who kill or harm female relatives who are accused of adultery, allow only male relatives to file incest charges on behalf of minors and absolve from criminal prosecution rapists who agree to marry their victims and remain married for three years. Rape laws distinguish between victims who are virgins and those who are not.”

From “Violence Against Palestinian Women Is Increasing, Study Says” by **Steven Erlanger**, New York Times, November 7, 2006

Eavesdropping in the Halls of Jewish Academe

On December 17-19, the Association of Jewish Studies held its 38th annual conference in San Diego. Academics from around the world gather to present new research, discuss emerging theories and generate new ideas. With well over a hundred forums, and multiple presenters per forum, this is a veritable feast of Jewish scholarship. We've selected a handful of telling comments from the scholars' presentations:

Judith Baskin, University of Oregon
Adding Women and Gender Studies to the New Encyclopedia Judaica:

"On the whole, however, the authors of these entries [in the first edition] gave no consideration to women, their lives or their contributions in their discussions. In addition, references to sexuality and sexual behavior were avoided throughout the encyclopedia. Moreover, in the forty years since work had begun on the first edition of the EJ, the roles and impact of women on Judaism and Jewish life had undergone radical changes."

Tova Cohen, Bar-Ilan University
The Portrait of the Maskilah as a Young Woman:

"Contemporary historical-literary research has discovered the writings of dozens of hitherto unknown maskilot (enlightenment figures). These women did not restrict their roles to that of passive readers of haskalah texts. Rather, they intruded into the public sphere of authorship, which was then generally considered to be a male domain."

Annette Boeckler, College of Jewish Studies, Heidelberg
Miriam the Prophetess in the Passover Seder: A Liturgical Reflection:

"While Miriam's cup seems to be gaining more and more popularity, it doesn't seem to be clear where exactly Miriam's place in the Seder is. The Seder is a specific fixed structure of 15 steps illustrating past, present and future. Where would the best place be to insert Kos Miryam and how could this be done?"

Charlotte Katzoff, Bar-Ilan University
Matriarchal Knowledge in the Saga of the Patriarchs:

"Remarkably, however, although the patriarchs have many direct encounters with the divine word, and the matriarchs have almost no direct communication with God, at critical junctures in the unfolding of the narrative it is the mothers who 'get it right.' It is they who are invested with epistemic authority, and it is the fathers who show themselves to be 'in the dark,'—on the wrong track."

Andrea Lieber, Dickinson College
Domesticity and the Home Page: Blogging and the Blurring of Public/Private Space for Orthodox Jewish Women:

"What if Glückel of Hamlen, the seventeenth-century memoirist who wrote her life experiences as a legacy for her twelve children, had blogged instead?"

Additional topics included:

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University
Jews by Choice and Jews by Chance: Converts and Their Spouses Talk About Jewish Connections

Tobin Belzer, University of Southern California
Beyond Princesses and Yentas? Young Women's Responses to Mediated Images of Jewish Women

Barbara Johnson, Ithaca College
Mother Said, 'Sing Loudly!': Gender and Song Performance by 'Cochin' Jewish Women in India and Israel

Chana Kronfeld, University of California at Berkeley
The Verbal Art of [Dahlia] Ravikovitch's Political Poem

Zelda K. Newman, Lehman College, CUNY
What Women Won't Say: An Old Yiddish Purim Poem

—MW



Tefillin Barbie

Bloggers have been going wild for **Jen Taylor Friedman's** "Tefillin Barbie." Taylor Friedman, a *soferet* (Torah scribe), posted the picture to her website, www.geniza.net, and soon the Internet was aflame, with the picture re-posted on blogs and websites, and responses that ranged from disgust to delight. Barbie comes complete with tallit, tefillin and Babylonian Talmud.

"We are deeply saddened and disappointed by this cowardly last minute cancellation, which will disappoint not only *agunot* worldwide and their families, but all Jews who believe in justice."

Leah Aharonov, president of the International Council of Jewish Women, on the cancellation of a conference in Israel to address the plight of women "chained" by Jewish law to husbands who refuse to grant them a divorce.

One in Eight: Breast Cancer Roulette

When long-time Middle East peace activist **Janice Fine** was diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer at age 32, she started asking questions. For one, why has the incidence of breast cancer grown by approximately one percent a year since the 1940s? Is it simply that we have better detectors, or is something in the environment causing this groundswell?

Cynthia A. McKeown's riveting 2004 documentary, "One in Eight: Janice's Journey," doesn't answer these questions, but the fact that it asks them, moving us from pink ribbons to in-depth probing, is important. So, too, is the deeply personal look we get into one woman's sojourn from perfect health to full-time patient.

"Cancer hijacks your whole life," Fine says. "It takes up all your time."

"Women in their 30s are not expecting a diagnosis like this," says surgeon **Susan Troyan**.

Fine's ordeal began in 1992 when she found a lump in her breast while

showering. She immediately went to her general practitioner and was sent to a surgeon who assured her that the lump was a cyst.

A mammogram, taken a few months later, came back clean. A year later, when the "cyst" remained palpable, Fine was sent to a radiologist, who told her that she had a cancerous tumor that needed to be excised. Since then, Fine has learned that half the breast cancers found in women under 50 are undetected by mammograms. Why, the film queries, are women in their 30s and 40s not told this?

Fine's diagnosis led her into a whirlwind of research, fact-finding and decision-making—as well as surgery and chemotherapy. Throughout, her friends and family mobilized, raising \$25,000 and providing a constant stream of food, camaraderie and emotional sustenance. Early in the film she quips, "If love is a cancer-fighting agent, I'm gonna be fine." Later, she admits to "the realization that you might not live through this."

McKeown captures Fine's physical and emotional state in month-by-month vignettes.

When Fine begins chemo, for example, she has to decide what she will do when she loses her hair. "Early on," she says, "I had a wig made. I thought I'd cover my head 24 hours a day. I could not imagine walking around bald. The fitting took five visits, but I have not put the wig on once since I lost my hair. It denies the reality of my life, that I have cancer and am undergoing a profound change."

Fine got her Ph.D. in 2003 and is now a married mother of two working as a college professor. Despite her successes, she says "I have to live with the possibility of recurrence. My life will never be the same."

—**Eleanor J. Bader**

For more information or to order the film, contact Cynthia McKeown at camworkz@aol.com or 617.323.9955



Left: Cynthia A. McKeown,
Right: Sarah Chalke as
Geraldyn Lucas

I Wore Lipstick to My Mastectomy

The phrase "Lifetime Movie" has come to be a little bit of a put-down; we expect something slightly sappy, treacherously or simply full of bathos. "Why I Wore Lipstick to My Mastectomy," based on the autobiographical **Geraldyn Lucas** book by the same name—which debuted in October on Lifetime—not only makes fun of the stereotype in a self-referential comment, but may be on its way to remaking the genre of the "breast cancer movie."

Perhaps because the intended and expected audience is and has always been women, perhaps because the topic at hand is so dire a reality for so many, many breast cancer narratives have been relegated to tones of desolation and depression or monotone heroism. "Why I Wore Lipstick to My Mastectomy" demonstrates that creators of television movies are catching on to the idea already sweeping "edgier" art forms

such as graphic novels—that narratives about cancer can be multi-dimensional, and sometimes even funny. (The film opens with Geraldyn in a strip club, seriously trying to unlock the secrets of why breasts are so central to men's conception of women.)

Maybe it's just about putting breast cancer into the larger context of women's lives. In "Mastectomy," Geraldyn (played by actress **Sarah Chalke**) doesn't fit clearly into any stereotype; although a determined list-maker and goal-achiever, Geraldyn is more comfortable seeing herself as a "gloss-girl" than a red-lipstick go-getter. The movie traces Geraldyn's journey from her discovery of three lumps in her breast and treatment (including the mastectomy of the title) through her physical—and true emotional—recovery. The extended cast of characters (which includes Geraldyn's husband, friends and immediate family,

the last of whom seem strongly coded as Jewish) allows for any number of issues—cancer-related and otherwise—to be explored dynamically and engagingly.

The movie stands on its own as a good film, even a "girlfriends" film. In addition, educators will find this movie an excellent resource, showing-without-telling valuable lessons about everything from how to communicate during grave illness to how to cope when medical treatments interfere with your body image. It is a pleasure to realize that filmmakers are finally catching on to what women want to see: characters who are smart, ironic, self-aware, fearful, irrational, ever-evolving people—just like us. —**MW**

More information on the film and Lifetime's breast cancer awareness campaign at www.LifetimeTV.com.

For the first time in my adult life, I see a serious threat not just to abortion, but to birth control as well. If the 'privacy' argument of *Roe* is rolled back, what about the privacy argument of *Griswold*, the Supreme Court decision that made contraception legal?"

Caryl Rivers in Women's E-News, November 8, 2006

The National Book Awards 2006 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters went to Adrienne Rich, 76, author of 16 volumes of poetry. The judges recognized "her incomparable influence and achievement as a poet and nonfiction writer. For more than 50 years, her eloquent and visionary writings have shaped the world of poetry as well as feminist and political thought."

Mikvah Becomes Mainstream?

The Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (an organization of Conservative rabbis), has been spending a lot of time on difficult questions stemming mainly from the intersection of modern life, ritual law and an evolving scientific understanding of sexuality.

This fall, the Committee tried to articulate a Conservative movement stance on the issue of *mikvah*, or ritual bath, used for post-menstrual immersion. It was the first time the Conservative movement had come to any official position on this issue.

Three different opinions were accepted on the issue of *mikvah*. Interpretations of various Talmudic terminology varied, with

each of the three authors (**Rabbis Susan Grossman, Avram Reisner and Miriam Berkowitz**) agreeing that Judaism has a textual basis for some "purity rules." But Grossman and Reisner contend that the additional seven days of abstinence from sex after menstruation, as required by Orthodox practice, is not necessarily supported by the text. Berkowitz finds what she believes to be a textual basis to require this. The three also differ on the concept of "family purity" in an era when married partners might not see each other daily, and also on the meaning of male purity in the larger debate.

It's significant that the issue, which can be contentious, was formally addressed.



Conservatives Say Yes to Gay Rabbis

On December 6th, 2006, the Conservative Committee on Jewish Law and Standards voted to permit the ordination of openly gay and lesbian rabbinical students. The Committee accepted two very different halakhic interpretations, with rabbis **Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins** and **Avram Reisner** arguing for "the full normalization of the status of gay and lesbian Jews," according to a statement released by the Jewish Theological Seminary. Because the traditional ban was also upheld, congregational rabbis and the movement's multiple seminaries have the right to choose which rulings they wish to follow. Although even the more liberal ruling upheld the ban on male homosexual intercourse, and the gathering did not discuss gay "marriage," nonetheless the December vote is viewed as a major shift for the Conservative movement.—MW

Rabbi Grossman noted, "It reflects more than anything the Conservative movement's sense of comfort with itself as an authentic interpreter of the continuing evolution of Jewish law."

That comfort, and the confidence it gives, will be needed more than ever now that the Committee decided in December that openly gay and lesbian rabbinical students may be ordained. Although this affirmative vote technically only endows the movement's seminaries with the choice of ordaining openly gay students, its tacit approval is expected to result in much greater overall inclusion of gays and lesbians in Conservative Jewish life. Certainly, it is a time of great engagement with text and society for the Conservative movement.—MW

SO MANY RULES PROTECTION SEX AMONG ULTRA

The first time 12-year-old David Framowitz had his genitals fondled by a respected teacher from his yeshiva, he panicked, desperate to flee the parked car in which the man had given him a ride to school. Later, when he told his parents about what had happened, they dismissed his story, unable to fathom that a rabbi could be capable of such behavior. Not wanting "to cause trouble," Framowitz continued to suffer the abuse in silence, until he changed schools two years later. Now 48 and the plaintiff in a civil suit against this rabbi, and the school and camp that employed him, Framowitz has come forward to tell his story. Not surprisingly, reactions to it in the ultra-Orthodox world have hardly been encouraging for other victims.

Last May, **New York magazine** ran an article about the Framowitz allegations, and while many members of the ultra-Orthodox community expressed their outrage in private conversations, or anonymously on Internet blogs, the communal leadership remained silent. The few rabbis and other leaders who acknowledged the report expressed anger not about the alleged abuse and cover-up, but at those who brought the crimes to light.

That bombshell article (disclosure: I was quoted in it) suggested several reasons why confronting sexual abuse is a particular challenge for ultra-Orthodox Jews: the social stigma associated with being the victim of abuse; the age-old Jewish prohibition against *mesira*, or "informing" to the secular authorities; and the religious proscriptions against *lashon hara* (gossip) and *chilul Hashem* ("desecrating God's name," which in this context means giving the community a "bad name"). These impediments silence victims and protect perpetrators. Reporter Robert Kolker also speculated that the characteristically restrictive ultra-Orthodox approach to

sexuality may foster such abuse through its rigidly enforced sex segregation, strict laws governing physical contact between the sexes (including married couples), and taboo against talking openly ("immodestly") or educating young people about sexuality.

The conjectures in that article proved deeply offensive to many in the *frum* (religious) world. Orthodox advocate Marvin Schick, in his regular advertisement which runs as a paid column in New York's Jewish Week newspaper, accused Kolker of "group libel." In an op-ed article in the same newspaper, Avi Shafran, spokesman for the influential ultra-Orthodox umbrella organization Agudath Israel, offered a counter-argument:

A Torah-observant life does not lead to aberrant behavior; it helps prevent it.... That fundamental Jewish truth that human inclinations are harnessed and controlled by Torah-life and Torah-study is self-evident to anyone truly familiar with the Orthodox community. The vast majority of

SO LITTLE

by Hella Winston

& SUPPRESSION ORTHODOX JEWS

its members are caring and responsible people who lead exemplary lives, free in large measure from societal ills like rape, AIDS, prostitution and marital infidelity that affect their less "repressed" neighbors.... To imagine that what has defined traditional Jewish life for millennia is somehow a risk factor for abuse is to turn all logic and experience on their heads. The true risk factors, as mental health professionals attest, are things like absent parents, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of support systems and the touting of a Woody Allenesque "the heart wants what it wants" mindset, all considerably underrepresented in the Orthodox community. If any environment can reasonably be imagined to foster the bane of child abuse, it is the charged atmosphere of MTV, R-rated movies, contemporary advertising and uncontrolled Internet usage, not the universe of Jewish values.



How secular influences are demonized.
From a flyer found posted in Williamsburg, NY.

and interpretation of Jewish law, and strict boundaries between themselves and what they see as a corrupt—and corrupting—"secular" society. Though the Hasidim tend to promote an even greater separation from the surrounding culture than their non-Hasidic counterparts, both groups generally prohibit watching television, movies or sports; reading secular books, magazines or newspapers; using the Internet (except for business purposes); socializing with outsiders; and getting a secular education. These constraints are intended to protect religious integrity and help ensure the perpetuation of a way of life by staving off assimilation.

These communities—concentrated primarily in parts of New York and New Jersey—also enforce rigid gender roles, derived from a belief in the essential difference between men and women. Rules about "modesty" in dress and behavior also justify sex segregation in almost every area of social

There is no doubt that the vast majority of Orthodox Jews are caring and responsible individuals, and that Judaism stresses ethical conduct. Further, because the reasons for pedophilia are not completely understood, to assert a causal relationship between this disorder and the strict regulation of sexuality is problematic, just as inaccurate as blaming pedophilia on MTV or Woody Allen. However, many interviews I have conducted over three years with people intimately familiar with ultra-Orthodox life—including therapists, social workers, physicians, educators and community members themselves—suggest that some aspects of today's stringent ultra-Orthodox approach to sexuality, intended to promote marriage, procreation and a strong family life, can also (unintentionally) create conditions conducive to sexual abuse.

The ultra-Orthodox world consists of both Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews. While there are important differences between these groups, and within the myriad communities that comprise them, they share a punctilious observance

Detail from a flyer distributed recently by a women's group in Kiryas Joel.

life, including education, employment and family relations. Women generally have primary responsibility for the "private" realm of home and family, and some public charity efforts, while men—who, unlike women, are obligated to engage in religious learning—occupy public positions of leadership and power in the community.

A fierce commitment to sex segregation has emerged in the "rules" issued recently by the leadership of the Hasidic enclave of New Square, in New York's Rockland County, purportedly to ensure the "modesty, holiness and pureness" of this "holy shtetl." In this community of approximately 7000 people, about 30 miles north of Manhattan, Yiddish signs instruct women and men to use opposite sides of the street, to prevent them from walking or talking together in public. In addition, women in New Square are urged never to sit in the front seat of a car (as passengers only; women there and in several other Hasidic communities are not allowed to drive); not to congregate in middle of the street or talk loudly in public, especially at times when boys and men come home at the end of the day; not to sit or stand near the entrances of the school or their own housing complexes, since that might force men to pass by them too closely. The rules also prohibit girls from riding bikes or "dancing" on a trampoline, unless it is surrounded by an actual *mechitzza* (a wall separating women from men in synagogue and mixed social events). Other regulations warn against women wearing transparent hosiery, dying their eyelashes and sporting long wigs and housecoats outside the home.

Most of these regulations deal with control of women's bodies and their mobility, but they also imply that "immodest" women have the power to defile the entire community. In fact, ultra-Orthodox ideology places most of the burden for thwarting male sexual desire on women, who are to blame if male desire is incited.

In the upstate New York Satmar Hasidic community of Kiryas Joel, several women told me that they had received letters and visits from members of self-appointed community watchdog groups (*meshmeris hatznius*—"guardians of modesty") because they were seen to be violating communal standards. One woman was targeted for wearing a skirt that was "a few inches above regulation" (about three inches above the ankle is the custom), while another was approached because she and her husband often invited divorced men to her home for Shabbos, something the watchdogs apparently considered inappropriate mixing of the sexes; eventually both of these women moved with their families out of the community. This past August in Kiryas Joel, a flyer was posted publicly referring to one married woman by name and labeling her a "stinking carcass" and a "sinner" who must "abscond from" this "holy shtetl." No resident I spoke to could confirm this woman's sin, other than to mention that she dressed attractively and that she and her husband often invited other

Great News!

Aprons

Dear sister,

Our hearts are filled with pain & anguish as we try to find more zechusem during these trying times. Our gedolim have stressed the importance of protecting our families from outside influences. Unfortunately this not only effects us when we are outdoors, but also inside our yiddishe homes when we are confronted with our cleaning help dressed in a manor that is far from appropriate.

Thus, in response to this pressing need, a group of n'shei chayil in England have come up with the perfect solution. a neat, professional, comfortable and very flattering apron. to be worn as a uniform by all cleaning women when they enter your front door. These uniforms, which have been especially designed for this purpose, can be kept in your home, or offered to your cleaning help as a gift, to be worn as a badge of honor. In fact, if most of the local cleaning ladies are offered these uniforms at the same time, they will consider themselves part of an exclusive club, just like higher-class nannies or live-ins.

An additional benefit that the cleaning ladies will have is that they will be able to keep their own clothes cleaner & free of bleach stains etc. thereby protecting their own clothes and, the kedusha of our homes with one step.

Now, for limited time, lshaim mitzva, these uniforms will be available to the heimishe community for a very low price,

wholesale price is \$15 but now L'shem Mitzvah we will be selling them for \$8. far less than the wholesale cost. In Monsey, groups of high school girls will be selling these uniforms door to door, in order to make them available to everyone. Thus, hopefully we can guard Kedushas Yisroel by protecting our precious families from seeing these women dressed in provocative, pritzusdig, clothing.

*In the merit of this great mitzoah,
may we merit the Geulah Sbeileimah. speedily, in our days.*

young couples to their home to socialize.

Certainly New Square and Kiryas Joel are among the most extreme ultra-Orthodox communities; in more "modern" (and not exclusively Hasidic) neighborhoods, many ultra-Orthodox women do drive, and there are no directives ordering women and men to walk on different sides of the street. Nonetheless, throughout the ultra-Orthodox world schools are sex-segregated, and social contact with non-family members of the opposite sex, let alone casual dating, are generally prohibited. In this environment, all-male yeshivas can become breeding grounds for behavior that borders on—and sometimes crosses over into—sexual abuse. In an email to me, one Hasidic man I know personally explained how this can happen:

The atmosphere of sexual repression in yeshivas (at least the kind of yeshivas I'm directly familiar with) contributes to many sexual perversions in people not otherwise inclined to behave that way. I'm not only talking about the rampant gay sexual activity ("rampant" as in relative to what I would expect; I don't know if it's rampant relative to a similar secular environment), but also pressuring younger boys into

acquiescing to certain acts by the older boys, offering payments—or certain electronic goods in lieu of payments—for outright molestation, and sometimes even rape. The vicious cycle is sometimes continued by newlywed young men coming back for their favorite “pets” even after they have a chance for something different (either because they are gay, or because they feel more of an emotional connection to their friends than they do to their wives). Even without the above, the outsized emphasis put—both explicitly and implicitly—on the sin of masturbation, combined with the extreme sexual repression, leaves many detrimental affects [sic] on most going through the system. Now combine all of the above with the fact that many people in positions of authority over young boys and teenagers are young men not yet mature enough to have acquired a healthy attitude toward sex after the perverse environment in yeshiva.

While this man stressed that the abusive behavior he described is by no means a universal feature of yeshiva life, his overall assessment of the environment, and its potential impact on students, was echoed by other people I have spoken to at length. A married Hasidic woman with whom I communicated online wrote “Everyone knows *frum* boys fuck around with each other in yeshiva, *mikvah* (the ritual bath). Because they are told DON’T EVER look at a girl...Blah Blah Blah.... They get married but still think of gay sex once in a while”—even though male homosexual sex is forbidden by the Torah. These observations were confirmed by a sex therapist working with ultra-Orthodox clients, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity because of her sensitive therapeutic role. She likened the situation in all-male yeshivas to that of prisons, or the military. “It’s the same thing. People are sexual and it gets acted out.” In fact, several men told me that sexually abusive teachers would often target boys they knew were already “sinning” by experimenting sexually with their peers, as a way to ensure their silence about the teacher’s abusive behavior. Further, my own research revealed that many Hasidic boys were groped or fondled in the ritual bath (*mikvah*), something that has been the subject of recent discussion on blogs like failedmessiah.typepad.com and jewishsurvivors.blogspot.com.

Some women also reported same-sex activity in all-female seminaries; notably, the women tended not to experience these relationships as hierarchical or abusive, but more playful or even loving. This may have to do with the fact that there is no explicit Jewish religious prohibition against female homosexual acts, and thus perhaps less guilt, shame and coercion surrounding such encounters. The sex therapist noted that the prohibition against male masturbation (“spilling seed”) can exacerbate problems for boys—at least those who take it seriously. Without any outlet for their normal sexual urges—one man told me that he and his classmates were instructed not to touch their penises even while urinating, lest they accidentally get aroused—particularly at a time when those urges are strongest, boys may act out sexually in ways they otherwise would not if other options were not forbidden.

Young people growing up in ultra-Orthodox communities generally receive no formal education about sex. All of

the Hasidic men I spoke with told me that in their schools, boys skip the sections of the Talmud that deal with sexual matters. While their non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox counterparts apparently do study this material, they do so in a very technical manner, focusing, for example, on laws relating to sexual relations in marriage, or on menstruation.

Sanctioned sex education generally occurs only in the weeks before one’s wedding, typically an arranged marriage. One man summarized for me the session with his “sex rabbi” this way: “He told me to do a little kissy, kissy, touch her here and there, and then put it in.” A Hasidic woman

WHY THE SILENCE? FEAR OF BRINGING SHAME ON THE FAMILY KEEPS PEOPLE FROM REPORTING ABUSE AND PROSECUTING ABUSERS.

described being on the receiving end of such advice: “My husband had no idea what he was doing,” she told me. “It hurt and was humiliating.”

People in the secular world are hardly immune to such experiences. However, a taboo against talking about sexuality can do more than predict awkward wedding nights; it can also foster a profound sense of shame around sexuality, and about the body and its functions. Many Hasidim told me that they had never even learned the words for genitals, but were taught to use euphemisms instead; for men, for example, “the organ of the *bris*.” With no vocabulary—let alone permission—to discuss matters of a sexual nature openly, people who have been sexually abused often have trouble communicating, or even understanding, what has happened to them. A social worker illustrated this quite strikingly when she described to me an interview she conducted with an 18-year-old Hasidic victim who had been molested: lacking the words for parts of his own body, the young man had to use gestures to indicate what happened to him. Even for people who are able to speak about such experiences, there is often an inordinate amount of shame involved in the disclosure. One woman recounted her parents’ reaction to her revelation that she had been repeatedly raped by her brother:

[You] know damn well that anything sexual is not discussed in a frum household. My mom and dad, they moved on, dismissed it like it never happened. [My mother] does not know that such actions screw you for life. She is in denial. I don’t know if it’s only my parents or all frum parents. My father, after he was told, did mention he wants to kill my brother, that’s all. I was told [by a non-family member] to buy a book and read it, regarding incest. On my wedding day, my father found it and was so upset that I was reading such a sexual book. Oh, come on, it’s ok for your fucking son to fuck me, but it ain’t ok to heal through reading such a book.

One highly regarded Manhattan psychiatrist, who treats many ultra-Orthodox patients and who spoke on condition of anonymity in order not to compromise his therapeutic relationships, told me he had noted a good deal of what he called “casual incest”—sexual activity between siblings—among his patients. He attributed this to the fact that boys reaching puberty are denied what would be considered healthy contact with females apart from close relatives and, with masturbation considered sinful, end up acting out sexually with whomever was available.

Of course, no one suggests that there are more abusers in the ultra-Orthodox world than in the general population. Research by psychologist Dr. Michelle Friedman, appearing last summer in the annual student journal of Yeshiva Chovevei Torah, Milin Havivin, found that Orthodox girls and teens report rates of sexual abuse similar to that of their secular counterparts. The main difference is that, for a variety of reasons, within the ultra-Orthodox world abuse if it does occur is more likely to go unchecked, allowing abusers to remain in business longer, creating more victims.

Why the silence? Bringing shame on one’s family is a significant obstacle to reporting abuse and prosecuting abusers. Because most marriages are arranged on the basis of individual and familial reputation, public knowledge that a person has been a victim of abuse severely compromises his or her options for making a “good match.” The stigma of abuse taints not only the victim but siblings and other relatives as well. As a result, those who have been abused (and their families) have a tremendous incentive to keep the abuse a secret. One woman told me that her father, learning that she had been raped by a respected member of the community, threatened to burn her with a hot pan if she ever told anyone in the community about it; she was 10 years old at the time.

Another serious impediment to rooting out abuse is the communal prohibition against *mesira*, betraying the community to outside authorities. Once punishable by death, *mesira* is still taken seriously, discouraging most people from reporting abuse to the police. When I asked her whether she had ever considered going to the police, one woman who was molested replied, “I don’t think so! It does not work like that in the frum world. You shall not be a *moser*, which means no telling on others; suffer in silence.” This attitude is pervasive, despite a recent ruling by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, a Jerusalem rabbi considered by the ultra-Orthodox to be one of the most respected interpreters of Jewish law. Elyashiv’s ruling held that it is permissible to hand over a child abuser to the American police in cases where “It is clear that [the person] has committed a foul deed, and that this [informing] constitutes a sort of repair of the world.” However, even in light of this clear ruling, the fear of being branded an informer remains strong, and is often exploited by those in power as a means of silencing victims, protecting the community’s “good name”—and protecting the abuser in the process.

Many parents privately express concern about this issue, and claim they would like their leaders to prevent sexual

abuse in institutional settings, and to deal with it effectively when it does occur. Most also say, though, that they themselves are unlikely to speak up about their concerns, let alone “inform” to the police on an abuser. Further, most admit that they would not allow one of their own children to marry a known victim of abuse.

While the outside world responds to such reports with shock, there is no denying the role played by the larger society in enabling this state of affairs. In the name of deeply held American commitments to religious freedom, these communities have been allowed to flourish with little outside oversight. A combination of ignorance and nostalgia often makes these very stringently observant and closed communities immune to serious scrutiny by fellow citizens—particularly liberal Jews who may idealize or romanticize this way of life, or politicians who appreciate the fact that ultra-Orthodox leaders can and do deliver votes in a bloc.

Unlike their public-school counterparts, administrators in ultra-Orthodox schools and other non-public schools are not required to run background checks on teachers, and because clergy are exempt from being mandated reporters, ultra-Orthodox teachers (most of whom are rabbis, at least in boys’ schools) are not legally required to report suspected cases of abuse. And where distortions of Jewish law and custom may be invoked to prevent people from taking legal action, and educational options are limited, there may be little motivation for self-policing, aside from the obvious: the health and welfare of young people. Instead, this past August, a few months after the original magazine article appeared, the teacher accused of sexual molestation was spotted escorting young campers to a water park in Connecticut, and a reliable source told me that he has since been soliciting parents to sign their children up for a similar outing next summer. At Rosh Hashanah, he was also reportedly asked to blow the shofar in his shul, an honor accorded only the most respected members of the community. One can only imagine how his victims must feel about that. ■

Hella Winston is author of Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels. She received her PhD in sociology.

www.theawarenesscenter.org Offers comprehensive information and Jewish resources on sexual violence, a speakers’ bureau and a certification program for Jewish community leaders. In the two weeks following the New York magazine article, The Awareness Center received over 60 calls from (mostly male) survivors who’d never before told anyone they were abused as children.

www.jsafe.org Run by Rabbi Mark Dratch, JSafe is aimed at addressing the issues of domestic violence and child abuse in the Jewish world through newsletters, conferences and comprehensive training for people working in Jewish organizations.

jewishsurvivors.blogspot.com A blog administered by anonymous Jewish survivors of sexual abuse provides general information on childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault and rabbinic misconduct.

Jimmy Swaggart Teaches Me Faith

September 24, 2004

Jimmy Swaggart broadcast the message
on t.v. this morning in all fifty states
plus Canada, that if a gay man ever
looks at him like that, he's going
to kill him, then tell God. The voters
of Louisiana have just banned gay marriage.
In Jimmy Swaggart's New Orleans chapel,
his congregation cheers, claps, and
stands. In my house, it's Yom Kippur,

day of atonement for sins against god,
promises broken. I follow the laws I can.
I light candles and do not bathe, wear
leather shoes, or anoint myself with oil.
I don't fast because it's too hard,
I don't pray because I don't know how.
Mama and Papa never taught me, though
they forced me out of the car to synagogue
each Saturday. Friday nights we repeated

ritual Sabbath prayers. *Barukh atah adonai*,
we said, and ate the braided bread.
We did not mention god or faith. We lit
fresh candles, drank our wine and sang.
My Mama and Papa, my sister and I,
sang like our lives hung on the dovetail
of our harmony. We searched
the deep wooded eyes of our blood and
sometimes cried as we sang. Is praying

like begging? Is breaking a promise
to god like breaking a wine glass? I made
no promises to god this year, therefore, broke
none. I have wandered the desert twenty-five
years. Desert of bigots, desert of bottles
shot from car windows. Desert of televangelists,
desert of the twisted hot hate of the humid South.

Desert where my mother drew the blue
curtains before I lit Sabbath candles, desert
where I can't walk downtown with my lover.
Jimmy Swaggart has scared me into talking
to god. I pray for this man's removal
from the air. I will write angry letters. Next
Yom Kippur I will have broken many
promises. I'll collect the shattered glass,
even though it looks broken forever, just
grains of blowing sand. I will join the mess
back together. Pour the wine. Drink.

by Miller Oberman

Taking The Ritual Laugh

The last conversation that I had with my great-grandmother before she passed away captured, perfectly and absurdly, the way in which the women in my family observe Orthodox Judaism. My mother, my grandmother, my sisters and I were visiting my great-grandmother, Mutti, right before Rosh Hashanah, and shortly after her stroke. As we chatted around her dining room table, our usual coffee talk transported temporarily from Sarabeth's Café to this haven of 70s-era furniture, it seemed as if Mutti was someplace else. She was; she had been sick for a while, and was by then rarely lucid. But when detailed talk of the upcoming holiday arose—meal times, what outfits to wear each day to synagogue—a flicker of interest crossed my great-grandmother's face. Suddenly, her voice was clear and strong:

"Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbos this year."

"What, Mutti?" we asked, clinging to her every word.

"Don't go to shul."

My great-grandmother's legacy: when Rosh Hashanah falls on Saturday, there is no blowing of the shofar (for that would violate the rules of Shabbos). Women are obligated to hear the sounds of the shofar, one of the few time-bound commandments in which women are included. Otherwise, shul is optional—the conventional practice, surely, but by the letter of the law there is no commandment for women to pray in congregation. The setting for her message was apt: surrounded by the family women, and only women. Women, the alleged second class of Orthodoxy, but for my family, a group personified less by the biblical matriarchs than by the mother of the Manchurian candidate. Manipulators, co-conspirators who cluster in the bathroom at bar mitzvahs and peek at novels hidden behind their prayerbooks.

Ironie Orthodoxy: this has long been the attitude of the women in my family, and it is an inheritance with which I struggle daily. It is, too, an attitude particular to Orthodox women, dependent on the feeling of rejection that accompanies being barred from religious leadership. For my father and brother, though their ability to point out the ridiculous in people is unparalleled in its sharpness, their allegiance to rabbis is purer, unmarred by this sense of exclusion. For women, on the other hand—especially for women who believe that their talents are potentially limitless—subscribing to Orthodoxy requires a quiet subversion of power assignments. This attitude fosters, for better and for worse, an unyielding sense of sisterhood. Its mantra: Send the men off to shul—then the real conversation may begin.

My mother has often described the exclusion of women in daily Orthodox Jewish ritual as a pleasure—"who wants to do all that extra work?" This is not, mind you, an attitude which stems from indifference or a lack of depth. My mother is a brilliant woman—a professor of Jewish law, she writes and lectures widely on topics in Jewish legal theory, including quite often, matters related to Judaism and feminism. She was the first person from her yeshiva high school to go to Princeton.

And she comes by her feminism quite honestly: my grandmother fought bitterly for my mother to be able to go away to college, a practice unheard of then for Orthodox Jewish girls. My grandmother too, conveys mixed messages when it comes to the conventions that the Orthodox community asks of women. When I was planning my wedding, she cajoled me every day about my dress, thinking the sleeves were too short and that I would be considered immodest (a battle she lost). Since I have been married, she calls every

"I hope you're ordering takeout for Shabbos. You're too young to cook." Be a kallah (bride) on the outside, my Grandmother says, a feminist on the inside.

Friday afternoon to tell me, "I hope you're ordering takeout for Shabbos. You're too young to cook." (This battle, so far, she has won). Be a *kallah* (bride) on the outside, she says, a feminist on the inside.

Make sure to be on time for shofar blowing, but don't go to shul when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos. I know it is an attitude that seems flippant, even hypocritical, but the first part is undertaken seriously, with a deep sense of commitment to Jewish people, traditions, and texts. As is true of most adherents to a rigorous religious lifestyle, deep convictions and personal motivations co-exist, neither explanation more true than its counterpart. For my great-grandmother, a notoriously paranoid person, ritual was an exercise in control.

She could know where her husband was and what he was doing, and the women could be home having their own secrets. For my grandmother, caught in the genteel generation that preceded Jewish feminism, this attitude serves as a pastel pink cover for a Betty Friedan book. She can adhere to the observable standards of Orthodox practice but subvert them internally.

It's a strange legacy, to grow up in an Orthodox society, to feel the pressure to conform that accompanies a life of constant ritual, but at the same time to be taught that utter conformity is a surrender. There are times when I resent these contradictions, what my family would euphemistically call our complexity. How should one distinguish complexity from hypocrisy, ambivalence from laziness? The purity of a religious identity holds a distinct appeal, likely the appeal that draws most newcomers to such a lifestyle—the sense of righteousness that comes from not only doing, but knowing why. But despite years of yeshiva, countless holy texts studied, infinite prayers recited, many a Purim costume donned—for me, these rituals have always been sources of questions, often rich and interesting ones, and not of answers.

On my best days, I believe that this attitude, the ability to practice while questioning infinitely, is a gift more than a burden. I was privileged to grow up an insider in the Orthodox world, heir to its rich traditions, its warmth and its strength. But while I was expected to perform certain actions—to attend Shabbos meals in Shabbos outfits, to learn the Talmud regularly—I was subject to no expectations about my beliefs, no censors governing my conversation. The regular absurdity of communal life provided our dining table with endless, occasionally ruthless, social commentary, but the possibility of discarding the community altogether never entered anyone's mind. As Freud pointed out, humor is a unique tool for those who wish to live just inside communal bounds; for in order to mock properly, you must already be in on the joke. It was a crucial freedom, allowing me to be entangled with traditions instead of strangled.

And so it was quite a shock to me when, three days before my wedding, I went to the mikvah for the first time to undergo a ritual bath: because I loved it. Of all the rituals that I partake in as a self-declared Orthodox Jewish feminist, this one should have been the most confusing. We Orthodox women rarely have to leave the house for a ritual that doesn't require pantyhose, let alone one at which pantyhose are truly discouraged. We rationalists don't believe that swimming on West 78th Street absolves us of all sins. We feminists embrace our sexuality, our mystique, our strength and our femininity. We need men telling us to take a bath? That our beautiful bodies are untouchable without throwing on some holy water?

But alone in that room, reciting a prayer to God for the protection of my husband, my marriage, my new home, I felt wonderful. Like never before, I inhabited a ritual, outside and also, to my surprise, in. In that small private space, there was no room for mockery, no one with whom to whisper cutting quips or roll one's eyes. I felt relaxed, joyful, possibly even spiritual (Mutti, forgive me). I owe this joy, I

believe, to this legacy of complexity, of hypocrisy perhaps, that I received from my family. Even with my overeducated feminist sensibility, I could enjoy this ancient ritual, frowned on by most students of contemporary gender theory, because to me such a feeling of purity is itself an act of subversiveness and innovation. I was never taught that I had to feel a certain way when performing a mitzvah, and so I am not plagued by the idea that for some, the mikvah expresses a stigma against female sexuality. People believe a lot of things, some of them beautiful and some of them crazy; but I do not have to share their motivations. To me, the mikvah was romantic, symbolizing that even in my most private moments I would continue to find meaning in Jewish traditions, that I could honestly promise to commit to my own life choices, not only to myself, but to my husband too. Becoming a 23-year-old Orthodox wife could have meant that I would have to keep



hiding parts of myself within—the powerful parts, the critical voice, even the part that, despite criticism, still believes—but at that moment I felt, well, naked. Revealed.

Okay, I did laugh to myself when the mikvah lady instructed me to cover my chest as I dipped, because of course, God can see you naked, but apparently He is not a breast man. So I guess there is always a little room for irony, even in the most sacred of spaces. ■

Rebecca Stone is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at the Derner Institute. She lives with her husband in Manhattan. Miriam Stern ("Shiksa Arml," above) is an award-winning artist who has exhibited in Israel and throughout the United States.

Losing a child: how grief has fueled three mothers' activism

By Rabbi Susan Schnur

Talking with mothers who have lost children, I have felt that I heard—I mean, really heard—the prophet Jeremiah's familiar words for the first time: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children and *refuses to be comforted*." Why? "*Because they are no more*," Jeremiah answers tautologically. "Because they are no more."

Bereaved mothers turn towards different strategies in their attempt to "contain" their loss. The women profiled here—Ruth Schulman, Rochelle Sobel and Susan Weiner—turned to activism. Three emotions converged that seemed to prompt them. First, returning to their lives after their children's death—as though nothing had changed—felt a sacrilege. Second, being "helpless" felt oxymoronic—mothers are not helpless; the need to refute such powerlessness at times overwhelmed them. Third, the thought that their child might be forgotten in the world—that the universe might actually erase the precious names Adina, Aron and Adam—was more than they could bear.

In talking to Rochelle, Ruth and Susan, I was struck by the extra burden they each carry of living in a culture that marginalizes the experience of grief, that speaks of "closure" as a defense against non-grievors' sense of helplessness, that

trivializes and dismisses, rather than honors, the importance of memory, and that reacts with puzzlement and judgment to the fact that some holes in the heart will always be holes. The overriding message in our culture is: move on, move on. If you don't move on, that speaks poorly about who you are.

The cultural mythologizing of motherhood is a burden, too—mothers are God, omniscient and omnipotent when it comes to their children: What lesser beings we must be when, from our perch in Maryland, we fail to stop a tired bus driver from speeding on a road without a guard rail in Turkey. Why hadn't we seen to that guard rail? Why hadn't we been in that dormitory room at college?

Several studies of bereaved mothers reflect that bereavement following the death of a child lasts forever. But need that be inconsistent with changing the world while one grieves?

Lilith here profiles three mothers whose covenants with their children involve founding organizations in their memory. Collectively these women create a powerful recursive voice that at the same time curses darkness and lights a candle.

Where is it written that we can't do both? These women are going to disturb the universe for a lifetime.

Believing in young Jews who want to change the world

An interview with Ruth Schulman

[AMY ADINA SCHULMAN, 1966–1986]

I interviewed Ruth Schulman on November 2—the 11th of Heshvan—the date of her daughter Amy Adina’s yahrtzeit. It had been 20 years since Adina, an undergraduate at Rutgers, died. She had been 20. If she had lived, she would be turning 40.

“Adina’s yahrtzeit always coincides with Princeton at the height of its autumn glory,” Ruth said. “It’s so beautiful here, the leaves are falling, and my body always feels pain, my system feels such physical shock. Every year at this time, I find I have to cry, I have to talk to people about Adina.”

Ruth had just returned from a meeting of an interfaith group that was supporting a Nicaraguan refugee when the phone rang. It was 10 PM. It was someone from a hospital wanting permission to treat Ruth’s daughter. Ruth told them, “I don’t know what you’re talking about; Adina’s over 18—*she* can give permission.” The caller replied, “She’s in a coma.” Ruth repeated, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Ruth and her husband Mel hurried to New Brunswick, New Jersey, where they were told that their perfectly healthy daughter had had an aneurism that had flooded her brain. There was nothing the physicians could do. Ruth called their son Dan and screamed at him, “Call Joel—your sister is dying and you have to get to the hospital immediately.”

At 2:30 AM, a resident asked the Schulmans about organ donation. “It was 1986,” Ruth remembers. “People weren’t yet really talking about ‘organ donation’. We had just been in the emergency room; it was all so impossible. We were absolutely stunned. But the resident had asked us to talk about organ donation, and so we talked about what Adina would do. She was an activist—always out there with petitions, demonstrating—anti-war, pro-environment. She’d spent a year on a kibbutz and she would write home about sexism, about writing Golda Meir to object to West Bank settlements. She had very liberal values, and she really believed that a single person could change the world.”

The family agreed to donate Adina’s organs. “This is exactly what Adina would want,” Ruth remembers them saying. “Adina was a perfect candidate—20, healthy. I remember sitting next to her, thinking, ‘This is Sleeping Beauty.’ She looked absolutely perfect. There was nothing wrong with her.”



Israelis Healing, The Dead Sea Peace by Jenni Kolsky Goldman, one of the Amy Adina Schulman Fund grant recipients. This image is part of her series “documenting peace in the Middle East” with images of healing. The artist comments that “the waters of the Dead Sea absorb the spiritual differences of the Middle East to create an atmosphere of universal coexistence.”

The following day Adina’s friends told the Schulmans that a group of them were visiting a friend off-campus when Adina very suddenly said, “I have a terrible headache. Not like anything I’ve had before. I’m going to die. Call my parents and tell them I love them.” She fell and couldn’t get up. The ambulance wouldn’t take her without her permission, so her friends screamed at her, “Say yes, yes, yes!” Adina somehow got out the word “Yes.”

“What do you do when you have a 20-year-old daughter who is gone in an instant?” Ruth asks. “You don’t just put a plaque on a wall.” Donations in Amy Adina’s memory poured in, and the Schulmans—not knowing what to do with the money—asked their synagogue to hold it.

“We sat... Mel and I and the kids, over a period of weeks, and we talked,” Ruth remembers. “We needed to keep Adina’s presence in this world. But how? How do you do that? We felt that Adina would want us somehow to keep her values alive, her commitment to social justice.”

Ruth recalled being impressed in her own early adulthood by an activist named Abie Nathan who had become so frustrated by the political impasses in Israeli-Egyptian relations that he sold everything he owned, bought a boat and sailed the Mediterranean—broadcasting messages of peace in international waters. “It was powerful to see an individual—one person—commit himself to something he believed in passionately,” Ruth says. “Abie Nathan *did* something.”

The Schulmans found themselves asking, “Who is supporting young people going off and committing to what they want to do?” And they found themselves answering, “There

“What do you do when you have a 20-year-old daughter who is gone in an instant? You don’t just put a plaque on a wall.”

seems to be no one.” Says Ruth, “When we arrived at the right answer, it seemed so simple.”

Giving monies to causes that Adina championed—women’s issues, racial justice, progressive politics—lacked the immediacy that the Schulmans were after, the gift of implicitly trusting Adina, and, by extension, young pragmatist-activists like her.

“In essence, we decided that we wanted to say to our young applicants, ‘We don’t have a lot of money to give you. But what *you* want to do to make this a better world, that’s what you should be doing—and we want to support you’.” Their grantees, besides having a plan and a supervisor, had to make a commitment to speak formally about what they had done at the end of their project—at their synagogue, in a peer organization, in their community. Over the years the Schulmans have funded 367 young people, in projects that range from building latrines in Honduras, to working to outlaw the sexual trafficking of young women in Israel, to researching church-state separation in Western countries as part of a law clerkship for Israel’s chief justice.

The Fund also sponsors one speaker each year at the The Jewish Center of Princeton, the Schulman family’s home congregation. Speakers, needless to say, reflect Adina’s values, and have included Merle Feld, a poet and playwright, and Alice Shalvi, the founder of the Israel Women’s Network.

As Ruth and I talked, she noted that Adina’s upcoming birthday would mark the first day that Adina was deceased longer than she had been alive. “I don’t know where to put that,” Ruth said, “how to deal with that. Up until now she’s been alive. Is it time to forget her now? To remember her with just a corner of my mind? I can’t do that. Just like I couldn’t stop saying Kaddish after a year—I wasn’t ready to stop.

“People would say to me, ‘You have such faith. Such belief’. But that wasn’t the case. I davened because that was my time to be with my daughter. I could be with her for that half hour, and then I could go out into the world.

“The one question I still can’t answer is, ‘How many children do you have?’ I tell them I have one son and where he lives, and a second son and where he lives. I don’t give a number unless I want to get into it—because I have three children.

“Adina is amberized at 20 as a college coed who was a neuro-psychology major. I still see her friends—she had such a large, close *chevrah*—their babies, their husbands. I hear about their careers. But I can’t go that far into the future in thinking about Adina. All I know is where she was. I have to live with what I had and what was delicious. Would she be a social worker? Living in Israel? Would she be a wife? Adina used to say, ‘I want to make aliyah and I want my parents to do it with me.’ She was attached to so many things, trying to pull everything she loved together.

“After she died, I did something terrible. I watched ‘Our Town’ on TV, the part where Emily, who died in childbirth, wants to go back to her town for one day and she chooses her 12th birthday. She sits on a stool invisible to her mother, and her mother is talking and talking. ‘We have to do this and

we have to do that. We’re going to have a cake....’ Mama is too busy to look at her. And Emily says, ‘Mama. Look at me. Just look at me’—and her mother’s talking and running all around.

“I thought, Adina would say the same thing. She’d say, ‘Mama. Just look at me’. I was working and Mel was retired. He took her shopping for her first evening gown. When she needed a bathing suit, he’d be the one to say, ‘You can’t wear that bikini!’ All that time that we were so busy doing things.... There should have been more time looking at her, quietly, just the two of us, talking. Quietly. I want that time with her.

“When Mel got sick, we had learned this. His last four years, we really did them together. That’s what we learned. You have to *be* with each other.”

Ruth notes that administering the Fund takes an enormous amount of time—“It runs me instead of me running it”—but she continues to do it because new generations of young committed activists have projects that are wonderful. “I want to say, ‘Yes, that’s important’, ‘Yes, go do that’. ‘What you are doing is terrific’.

“I also run the Fund,” Ruth says, “because Adina was my daughter and I can’t let her go.”

The Amy Adina Schulman Fund, created by Ruth Schulman in 1987, has provided almost 400 grants in such areas as civil rights and peace work, feminist and egalitarian projects, and Zionist youth movement activities. You can apply for a grant or make a donation at www.amyadinaschulmanfund.org. On this website, you can also review past participants in the Fund’s annual lecture series, and read enthusiastic reports from grantees over the years.

Children’s Cause Cancer Advocacy, founded by Susan L. Weiner, works to advance research and services for childhood cancer patients and their families. Sign up for an on-line newsletter and find out how to advocate on these issues at www.childrenscape.org, where you’ll find updates about childhood cancer policy and numerous reference tools. 301-562-2765.

The Mary McDowell Center for Learning, also founded by Susan L. Weiner is in Brooklyn, New York, an elementary and middle school for children with learning disabilities; it provides information and support for families and the community www.marymcdowell.org or 718-625-3939.

Children’s Brain Tumor Foundation, where Susan L. Weiner was the first executive director, works to “improve the treatment, quality of life, and long-term outlook for children with brain and spinal cord tumors through research, support, education, and advocacy.” CBTF has programs for families and survivors and gives research and quality of life grants. www.cbtf.org or 866-228-HOPE.

ASIRT, the Association for Safe International Road Travel, was founded by Rochelle Sobel in 1995. At www.asirt.org you can subscribe to worldwide Road Travel Reports, access brochures and safety checklists for students and tourists abroad or make a donation. To reach ASIRT, call 301-983-5252.

Creating a career in children's cancer advocacy

An interview with Susan L. Weiner

[ADAM WEINER, 1976-1990]

Susan Schnur: Tell us about Adam, and about what it meant to care for him.

Adam was diagnosed in infancy with a large brain tumor. We were told he had only months to live. But he lived until he was almost 14. Being his mother was a 24/7 job; keeping him alive was tremendously complex—he had one catastrophic complication after another. He had many surgeries, a hemorrhage at age three that left him aphasic, with serious word-finding difficulties. He had perceptual problems, disabling headaches, constant pain. We never knew what would happen from one day to the next—vomiting, seizures, we just didn't know. Adam wasn't expected to live. How do you raise a child who is not expected to live? For one thing, you're medically hypervigilant. This part was extremely stressful for me. I had to be the buffer between Adam and the rest of the world in every way.

Like many children with brain tumors, Adam also had very disturbed sleep patterns. He woke up at 4 AM, so I did, too. We'd work on his skills—social skills, academic skills, motor skills. One morning he asked me, "Are you my mother or my teacher?"

Was that a good question?

That was *the* question. I was trained as a neuropsychologist—that term didn't actually exist yet—specializing in children's cognitive and language development, and now I had this damaged little child. All my life I had really wanted an academic career. But that's how it worked out; it's your responsibility to love and take care of your children. I was equally concerned with raising my daughter—with raising a healthy sibling—not just raising a dying child who wasn't dying. How do you raise a dying child and his sibling day to day, how do you manage, side by side, the banality of living and the terror of dying?

I founded the Mary McDowell Center for Learning, a school for children with learning disabilities, during this period. There was the need for an institution like that in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn. I visited many schools and saw how they worked. When I founded the Mary McDowell Center, I thought it might be appropriate for Adam,



Children at the Mary McDowell Center for Learning.

Bickers and Beechler Photography

depending on his needs at the time, but as it turned out, Adam didn't go there. But it serves children *like* Adam—kids with spark who require extra help.

The fact is, I was Adam's neuropsychologist—I was his teacher and his mother. I had to have a grasp of his core cognitive integrity, of what kinds of instruction would yield only humiliation and frustration for him, and what alternative routes would work. Adam could learn if only we were clever enough to adapt the world so that he could succeed at tasks. We had to enable him to bypass his lower-order deficits and access his higher-order intellectual potential.

What happened, then, around the time that Adam died?

My husband and I separated, my daughter was in her senior year of high school. No nurses anymore, no kids, no husband. My entire world disappeared—work, love, home life. That's enough to kill anybody. You know, when someone so close dies, disappears, it violates object constancy—physically and psychologically. You expect noises when there aren't any, you're primed for routines when there are none. No crayoned drawings, no unmade bed. It took a long time for me to learn about that absence, about Adam's not being there. You're still listening for noises in the middle of the night, you expect the bus to come down the street. One has to learn to unlearn all the connections—not just to Adam, but to events, objects, everything associated with him.

When children die, parents' attachment gets mapped onto residual events and ideas and objects. At a gathering where there were other women who had lost children, we started to talk about the physical things associated with our children, and everyone pulled out a picture, a locket. It's a way of holding on. Your children are so physically close. Clothing, even a foundation named for your child, helps us physically hold on to our children; it's part of being a mother. The physicality of the mother-child bond is so elemental. There were several times when Adam was expected to die, and I carried him around with me all the time. I had this notion, this irrational fantasy, that I could protect him

with my body, that somehow I could keep him alive with my body.

It was clear to me later that I had post-traumatic stress symptoms—I had all the classic signs: intrusive images, depression, sleeplessness, startling. For a while, I just tried to do one thing every day that would put me back in touch with the world. A walk, a lunch with a friend, and if I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it. And it was really a tremendous agony to figure out what I was going to do next: I was unemployed. How could I explain to a prospective employer what I had spent the previous 13 years doing? It shocked people. I couldn't recoup an academic career. I took a course in pediatric neuropsychology to see if I could do a second post-doc. But it didn't fit—I knew both too much and too little. It was very hard to translate my experience into a "career."

Ultimately, though, your 13 years of parenting and your Ph.D. and your non-profit work—it all must have made you professionally singularly valuable.

Yes. Well. First, I had to stop hemorrhaging inside. I learned to protect other people from how I felt. But it's always there—the loss, the anguish—just not so close to the surface.

I started consulting for a few non-profits, and I was on the board of the Children's Brain Tumor Foundation. They wanted me to be their first executive director, and I helped start the non-profit North American Brain Tumor Coalition. I began to get inquiries from the National Cancer Institute of the NIH, and the FDA, to serve on advisory committees as a patient advocate. The whole idea of "patient advocacy" was coming into its own because of AIDS and breast cancer activism. At first it felt really difficult to be immersed in childhood cancer issues all the time—no escape, all these parents turning to me for advice, but then I realized, "How incredible. How bizarre that I've come into this high-profile career." The very things that I thought were discontinuities and detrimental qualities became the combination that these national organizations found valuable. I worked very hard to learn about national issues and make my role valuable.

I founded the Children's Cause for Cancer Advocacy six years ago. Doing the work nationally on behalf of children with cancer, and their families, was sorely needed; no one was following the issues, and I now felt that my combined experiences obligated me to do this. I wrote a chapter on advocacy for a pediatric oncology text. Five years after that, I wrote another one. My grasp of the issues was better. I became a professional of a rather unique sort—my work had to do with saving other children, not Adam. I always talk about "our children."

There are two issues in pediatric oncology where I thought my advocacy could make a major difference: one has to do with accelerating access to new, targeted therapies to treat childhood cancers, and the other, making sure there is appropriate follow-up care and services for survivors, for children and young adults who have late effects from cancer therapies. Hopefully newer, more targeted treatments will eventually result in fewer late effects. We do training, conduct workshops, craft legislation, write about cancer policy, and advise national programs.

Do you feel that people who have not lost a child can understand your experience?

Well, I don't feel anymore that parents who have lost a child are the *only* ones who can understand. Over time, you learn other ways to translate your experience. An example is the classic dilemma of how to answer the question, "How many children do you have?" That used to be agonizing. I would say, "I have two children. I lost one, and one is in law school." Now I have other words. "I work as a national advocate on childhood cancer issues." People know you don't do this unless there's a personal reason. And you learn that eye contact can communicate how very personal these reasons are.

Some parents of special-needs children feel they can never do the right thing to help them.

That's true. I've called this the double-bind that parents of special-needs children experience: If we don't spend "sufficient" time reinforcing lessons from professionals, we are seen as neglectful. But if we understand our children's strengths and challenges and try to recommend strategies for learning and coping, we are seen as "overparenting."

As a professional, I can now frame this as a challenge: How can professionals collaborate with parents as peers, as they struggle to urge their children toward competent futures? How can neuropsychologists see parents as collaborators? Parents are the only ones who must integrate the information about their children from the multiple disciplines and specialists who see them. How can parents translate their wisdom into strategies that can be implemented at school and at home?

"How do you raise a child who is not expected to live?"

Adam asked you whether you were his mother or his teacher. How about Adam? Was he your son or your teacher?

Both. His own fierce determination and our approach to cognitive rehabilitation enabled him to jog, to be my sous-chef, to go to a local public school and to after-school programs and music lessons. He was loving and funny; and his *joie de vivre* was irresistible. He had the desire, above all, to be just like a "normal kid." All our children have that desire. They have a profound wish not to be socially isolated, and they have a deep delight at continuing to be alive—just like everyone else. How can we meet this desire? Like so many childhood cancer survivors, Adam was socially isolated. Only when we know how to teach successful social interactions can we begin to match the wishes and the rights of our children to be just "normal kids."

Adam did have one friend whom he saw occasionally, and this ordinary interaction with a peer was perhaps his greatest joy. In one of his last stories, he wrote: "This past weekend my friend Stuart came over to visit. We bounced around. We goofed about. We both went to see 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles'. It was grand."

Promising to make third-world roads safer

An interview with Rochelle Sobel

[ARON SOBEL, 1969-1995]

Susan Schnur: Rochelle, how did this journey begin?

My son Aron was 25, two weeks away from graduating from medical school. After his final rotation—he was volunteering at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem—he detoured to Turkey for a short vacation. We had just spoken by phone, and he had said, “Oh, Mom, you’ve got to visit here. The people are remarkable, the country is beautiful.”

My husband was taking our daughter Ana to the airport when the phone rang. It was the State Department. A bus had gone off the road into a ravine. Twenty-three people had died. I saw my husband coming up our walk, I went out to tell him, he buckled. I crawled into bed. The house became crowded with people. I would come down for a bit, then go back to bed, close the door. It was too much. I kept wanting to drink something hot. I was freezing, just freezing. People kept bringing me hot water.

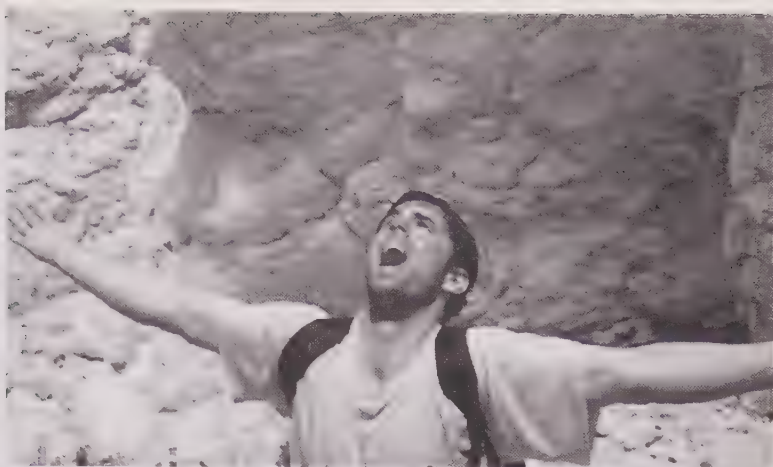
That first week was a blur. I took reality in very small doses. After a while, I felt as though someone were saying to me, “Okay, now you are going to live in hell, and your job is to plant flowers in it. That’s what we need to do.”

You teach Judaic Studies to second- and fourth-graders at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School. How did you handle your loss and grief with your students?

They were afraid to visit me during the shiva week, but they all did. We had immediately planted this garden in Aron’s memory in our backyard, and it gave my students and me a focal point, something that let us talk less frighteningly about life and death, about the struggle and the need to make the world beautiful. They kept worrying, “Will you be different, Geveret Sobel?” They wanted me to be the same. I told them that I would be sad, but that I would be with them and that would give me warmth.

And then you started moving to take action?

Well, everyone grieves in his or her own way. One day I found myself shouting to the walls. “I am not going to be a victim! I am not going to be a victim! We are not victims!” I couldn’t tolerate that feeling. There are groups that call themselves “victims’ organizations”, and it took me some time to realize that this characterization didn’t work for me. I needed to be fully proactive. I couldn’t save Aron, but



Aron Sobel in Turkey, 1995.

perhaps I could save other mothers’ children.

And then several things happened. My husband and I had gotten a document signed by the American Ambassador in Turkey, and one day I just called him. I said, “Mark, I don’t know what to do with my grief. Tell me what I can do in Turkey with my grief.” We went through a lot of possibilities. He said, “I’m tired of sending body bags home. Why don’t you start an organization like MADD [Mothers Against Drunk Driving]?”

That sat well with me. It was the kind of thing that Aron would do; Aron fixed problems. He had started an acting club for kids on an oncology ward. His apartment had been vandalized by teenage kids in Baltimore, and he responded by starting a basketball team for them! When Ethiopian kids started coming to Israel, Aron flew there to work with them. I have a wonderful photo of him encircled by these children. I thought, “I’m going to fix this—in a sense, *with* Aron. Because Aron can’t.”

When I was thinking straight again, after Aron’s death, I called the State Department. “How many people die in road crashes?” Nobody knew. “How many Americans?” “How many in Turkey?” They had no clue. I started looking for organizations that dealt with these issues. They didn’t exist. That seemed astonishing to me.

I felt that the State Department should know—I guess that was the beginning. I started to do research, country by country, with a friend who is a statistician. We called consulates, newspapers. We collected information that told us that road fatalities of Americans abroad was an enormous issue. We wanted to confront the State Department with these facts, to create a global climate that would not tolerate road injuries and fatalities.

Did you feel supported in your community?

My “mother instinct” and my “teacher instinct” told me, “So many talented and capable people, so many people

The phone rang. It was the State Department. A bus had gone off the road into a ravine.

with contacts. Aron's death is not your story, it's a community story."

We decided to hold a vigil in front of the Turkish embassy on Aron's 26th birthday. There were 150 people. We lit 23 candles for everyone who had died in that bus. We were standing there feeling alone and scared and angry. The ambassador came out and was very unfriendly. And then it sort of all changed. People working in the embassy started to come out and ask, "What is this about?" They started to hug me and cry and say, "We lost this one. We lost that one. Do what you can."

What was my job? To save the lives of other mothers' children—those families became my community, too.

The ASIRT board, in fact, came together because of community. One friend worked with me for hours, two nights a week, for 10 years—she has a family, a job. One man heard me speak in shul and he had contacts. A parent of a student of mine knew a road safety expert. Our annual dinners now have ambassadors from every country attending—some have become friends. We developed road reports on over 150 countries—the State Department has become ASIRT's best ally. All of these efforts are expansions of community.

Are you in touch with other parents who have lost children?

All the time, and it's extremely powerful. We immediately have a bond. I frequently talk with the parents of children who were studying abroad for a year. Physicians call me, people in road safety, and ask me to talk with mothers who have just lost a child. I call parents so that they can talk and I can listen. It's healing for them, it's healing for me.

Traveling in other countries where ASIRT is working to improve road conditions, I often meet bereaved mothers—Indians, Egyptians, Kenyans, Turks. We don't share a language, but it doesn't matter. Grief has its own language. We look in each other's eyes and know everything. We know the hell we all go through. We know that these accidents kill the future. In Turkey, the Speaker of the House said to me, "You must come home and meet my wife." They had lost a child. On every level, these children are my children. They are all also "our" children.

Did you ever see the place where Aron died?

For years, I couldn't even see the word "Turkey" without pain. But then in 2001, I went there with ASIRT to talk about the seriousness of their road issues. The American embassy worked with us; we met with ministers from the government, with the chief of police, with tourist organizations. Not every country ASIRT works with admits that road safety is an issue, but the Turkish people have been wonderful. Some laws were changed; policy-makers began to recognize that people in Turkey consider road safety a priority issue.

When I finally traveled to Turkey, we went immediately, along with TV crews, a US congressman and a lot of police, to the place where Aron was killed. Looking at the topography—we were up high on a narrow curving road on the edge

of a cliff; there were no guard rails—I finally got a picture of what had actually happened. Actually, the government had widened the road in preparation for my visit! We planted 23 trees at the site and put up a sign in Turkish: "At this site 23 people died because of the road and poor driver behaviors. Drive carefully. Life is precious."

One of the media photos was of young policemen crying. One of them sent me an e-mail: "Thank you that you come to our country to help. You lost your son here. We are your sons. We promise you that we will do more...."

Is mothers' grief different from fathers' grief?

I do think there's a "mother lioness" response—pouncing on any and all risk. But fathers mourn, too. My husband lends his skills to my organization, but that's not how he tackled his grief. In Kenya, I know a gentleman who coped with his son's death by founding an advanced driving school.

Are you afraid that an article about your activism in some way casts a judgment on parents whose bereavement follows other paths?

Yes. There should be no value judgments about how people grieve. Was ASIRT the right direction for me? I always ask myself that. I will never know. There are so many ways to respond to the death of your child. If I could have assembled a book of poems, I would have. Sitting quietly and thinking about your child is also a precious memorial to who they are. It keeps their memory in your heart. Beyond raw pain that never goes away, there is this terror that your child's memory will disappear in the world. You mourn the children they might have had who will never be born. Aron's medical diploma sits in a drawer. That's so painful to me. It's Aron's voice I need to have out there in the world, not mine.

Do you still speak about Aron's death with your students?

Every year on the anniversary of Aron's death, I talk to my students. I tell them, "I'm going to be sad today." I make them promise me that they will wear seatbelts forever, that they will never ever go into a car with someone who drinks. That if they ever find themselves in the car with a scary driver, they will say, "I am very precious to my fourth-grade teacher, and I made a promise when I was very young and I have to keep that promise. You have to either drive very carefully or let me out." As Aron's mother, I have an obligation to save lives; maybe I have saved one in this way.

I also travel a lot for ASIRT and I explain my trips to my students by talking about the importance of helping the world and other people. I tell them that the Bible says *lo ta'amod al dahm rai-echa*—"Don't stand idly by as the blood of your brothers is spilled." I would not be a good teacher to them if I didn't believe in what I'm doing. If I didn't live what I believe.

I want to kick people who use the word "closure."

continued on page 44

Lilith magazine turns 30 this year. In honor of this milestone, we invite you to listen in on various groups of Jewish women. This time, the early women rabbis. For other cohorts, visit Lilith.org.



Sally Priesand,
1972.

Ordained

women rabbis speak their minds

Rabbi Sally Priesand, the first woman ordained in the Reform movement—in 1972—retired last year from her position as rabbi of Monmouth Reform Temple in New Jersey. The Women’s Rabbinic Network, the official support and advocacy organization for women who are Reform rabbis and rabbinic students, decided to use this milestone occasion to ask our *vatikot*—our first-generation veteran Reform women rabbis—to reflect on their experiences. We wanted to honor Sally Priesand, but we had also become profoundly aware of the fact that our younger colleagues did not know the full “herstory” of women in the rabbinate.

The Jewish world has changed quite a lot in the 34 years since Rabbi Priesand was ordained. Women rabbis number in the hundreds. We have gifted women scholars teaching at Conservative and Reconstructionist and Reform seminaries. Ritual and prayer, academic scholarship and text commentary are created by women and now include female experiences. Even with this progress, the Women’s Rabbinic Network and similar groups still need to work hard to

insure salary parity, advocate for equitable family leave policies, support women in part-time and portfolio-specific rabbinates, and guarantee equal opportunity in placement and salary negotiation.

We encouraged our pioneers to share their professional and personal experiences, even if painful. Despite all the difficulties of being “firsts,” our colleagues had only pride when they wrote of their desire to serve as religious leaders in the Jewish community.

We all feel enormous gratitude to Sally for taking the first, brave step toward equal access for women in the rabbinate. Mazal tov, Sally, and thank you.

Rabbi Jackie Koch Ellenson, ordained in 1983, is the Director of the Women’s Rabbinic Network, and Chair of the Hadassah Foundation. Most of these comments appeared, in a different version, in WRN News.

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When I was ordained, it was difficult to find a job.

Some synagogues refused to interview me, others wanted me for my publicity value and still others wanted to be able to say they were the first to hire a female rabbi. In the end, I got what I have always considered to be the best job: Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City where Rabbi Ed Klein z”l taught me how to be a rabbi. I left the Free Synagogue after seven years when it became apparent that the congregation would never allow me (or any other woman) to be its senior rabbi. The next two years were spent part-time at Temple Beth El in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where I was warmly welcomed. I also served as a chaplain at Lenox Hill Hospital. I accepted these two positions because I was not able to find a synagogue willing to accept a woman as its only rabbi. In truth, our movement had not yet done the necessary groundwork to raise the consciousness of congregations. I remember a meeting I had with the placement commission: I walked into the room, saw sixteen men sitting around the table and said, “I hope you know that you are part of the problem.”

*Sally Priesand, the first woman ordained in the U.S., recently retired from Monmouth Reform Temple, NJ.*

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I fear that the epitaph on my tombstone will read “She was the one who brought the dildo to Reines’ class.”

Indeed, those were the days. The days when, for my first seminary year, I was the only woman in the rabbinic program at HUC in Cincinnati. The days when Alvin Reines, z”l, was teaching Maimonides’ Guide and using the Pines translation. And we all know the pronunciation of dear old Shlomo Pines’ last name! So every time Dr. R. wanted to refer to that translation, he turned to me and asked if I had “it” with me. Finally, one day I did . . . ergo, “She was the one who brought the dildo to Reines’ class.” Humor got me through. Those were the days, too, when a woman’s bathroom was near impossible to find on the HUC campus . . . the days when our “personal parts” weren’t yet covered on the school’s health insurance . . . the days when it was clear—wherever we went as student rabbis—that those who showed up came to see us fail (at least we drew crowds!) . . . the days of endless speaking engagements on “What It’s Like to be a Woman Student/Rabbi,” (as if I had any other gender frame of reference!) . . . and the days when nothing we wore was ever right!!! Grit and a sure sense of commitment to our sacred work got us through.

Myra Soifer was ordained in 1978, and is the rabbi at Temple Sinai in Reno, NV.

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When I arrived, I had no place to stay, for no one at the Jerusalem school would co-sign a paper needed for a pre-rental agreement.

Somehow the feeling permeated the halls that I was a rich, bored housewife who would not be up to completing the first-year program. (I was greeted upon my arrival at the school by the Dean’s unforgettable words: “Oh, you’re that crazy woman I’ve heard about.”) My children and I lived in four unsatisfactory places until August, when a real estate agent finally found an apartment for us. Nevertheless, classes had started and I was studying frantically; yet I felt most fortunate to have this opportunity. The credit for my success I give to my adventuresome children, my husband, home alone, working to support my dream, and the teacher of kitah aleph, who was the only one who believed that I could succeed. I completed my first year (I even won an award—The Most Improved Student!), probably spurred on by my classmates, who told me that if I were to fail, the College-Institute would most likely not admit any other “older students” into the rabbinic program. How far we have come in 30 years from that first “second-career” woman!

*Helene Ferris, ordained in 1981, recently retired as senior rabbi at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester in Croton-on-Hudson, NY.*

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I received the article from my mother, who sent it to me in Jerusalem, where I was studying at Hebrew University during my junior year in college.

As I wrote to Sally Priesand years later, it was that famous (infamous?) article from the New York Times in the Spring of 1972, entitled “Her Ambition Is to Become a Rabbi—and a Housewife.” I didn’t know then what I wanted to do after graduating from college. I was considering some kind of Jewish professional future or, perhaps, law school. And suddenly, although I already knew it was a possibility, there appeared the picture of the real, mini-skirted Sally browsing through a book, determined to succeed as a rabbi. What was important to me was that she existed, that I could do that too, that I could be a rabbi, I really could. Several years ago, I was startled to discover that my then-new rabbinic colleague, Shena Potter, had been born after Sally was already a rabbi. Shena had never known a world without female rabbis. I felt old and thrilled!”

Mindy Avra Portnoy, ordained in 1980, is a rabbi at Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C.

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More than thirty years ago, when people heard that her daughter was a rabbinic student, they would say to my mother, "She's going to be a *woman* rabbi??"

My mother answered, "I don't know what other kind she could be." I recall visiting a patient when I worked as a hospital chaplain, hearing "You're a rabbi, but you don't even have a beard." I responded, "No, and I'm not circumcised, either." In those days, as now, it helped to have a sense of humor and a great deal of patience to face the reactions of those who were amazed at my bizarre career choice.

*Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus, ordained in 1979, is the rabbi at B'nai Yehuda Beth Sholom in Homerwood, IL.*  
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We were all very young, most of us fresh out of college.

We were more accidental than intentional revolutionaries. We did not understand then that when you start out as the "first" anything, you always remain the "first." If you were the first woman to be hired as an assistant in a congregation, you naturally would be the first woman to be made associate there. If you were the first woman to become pregnant in that congregation, you would naturally become the first woman to negotiate maternity leave, to bring your baby to the Temple preschool, and to see your child become bar/bat mitzvah and confirmed. I thought I was done with all these firsts when I packed my kids off to college. Then our colleague Rabbi Patti Karlin Newman called and said, "Your son is the first son of a female rabbi to graduate from Stanford, so you are going to be invited to deliver the Baccalaureate at his graduation." Never let it be said that there are not great honors in being first. The drive that got us to rabbinical school drove us apart when we got there. It was our singular achievement that had gotten us this far, not our collaborative ability. Along with our male classmates, we studied hard. We were grateful for their support, but their experience was different from ours. We women labored under the added pressure that the individual sins of each of us were to be visited upon the whole. "The women" didn't talk loudly enough; "the women" didn't know how to carry the Torah. We worked against each other until finally we realized that competing made a lonely experience even lonelier. In the fledgling Women's Rabbinic Network, we tested out the possibilities of support and trust which fortunately have evolved into the blessing of friendship.

Ellen Jay Lewis, ordained in 1980, is the rabbi at the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey in Washington, NJ, and is a psychotherapist in private practice.
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The presence of women in the rabbinate challenged people to think about God in a different way.

The unconscious projections people often made, imagining that God looked something like their older bearded grandfatherly rabbi, couldn't happen with a woman rabbi. It followed that the masculine metaphors of our liturgy became inadequate and people became more thoughtful about how we speak toward a God who transcends gender. Women rabbis encouraged people to think about life cycle rituals that spoke to the reality of their own lives, from covenant ceremonies for girls, to rituals for miscarriage, to ceremonies for becoming an elder.

For a conference in celebration of the 20th anniversary of women's ordination, I was invited to deliver a paper on the experience of women rabbis. The career paths of women rabbis looked very different from those of men. Women tended toward education, chaplaincy, part time work, assistantships or small solo congregations. There were no women senior rabbis of large metropolitan congregations. Were women choosing different careers, or were they restricted by a stained glass ceiling? I discovered that few aspired to be like their senior colleagues, working without boundaries, leading top-down institutions. Some of them had negative experiences with their senior colleagues, not only inadequate mentoring but also abuse. I wondered whether large synagogues could be different, and whether I could be a different kind of senior rabbi.

I had a chance to find out. When Temple Emanuel in 1994 took a risk (I'd had no previous congregational experience) and chose me to be its senior rabbi, news reports read: "Stained Glass Ceiling Broken: Major Congregation Selects Woman as Senior Rabbi."

At Emanuel, after a few years with my gifted assistant rabbi, I asked some leaders of the Reform movement for examples of career paths where an assistant becomes an associate and then a co-rabbi. None existed, and I was advised to steer clear of that vision. But those advisors were wrong. At Emanuel, we have been strengthened by a model of partnership rather than competition, of shared leadership rather than hierarchy, both among synagogue professionals and between clergy and lay leaders. It is a model encouraged by women rabbis who continue to be catalysts for change.

*Laura Geller, ordained in 1976, is a rabbi of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, CA.*  
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Mina Bern, in her 90s, has acted in 11 films, including *Crossing Delancey*, *I'm Not Rappaport*, and *Avalon* among others, and brought Yiddish Theater to Broadway. Awarded a Workman's Circle Lifetime Achievement Award in 1988 and an Obie for outstanding achievement in 1999, she's a mainstay of American Yiddish theater who has performed for almost 70 years all over the world. Sometimes referred to as "the first lady of the Yiddish stage," she speaks five languages, but says she's proud that Yiddish is her "best." (Photo, 2006)

Yiddish Divas Take the Stage

photo essay by Joan Roth

"Our shoyresh (roots) are in the lives and works of Yiddish-speaking Jews. You cannot destroy me. I can go two days without eating and nothing would kill me, because my roots are still alive. I would never express myself in the heymish (familiar) way that I do if I hadn't been born into a Yiddish-speaking family. I want to be remembered, and so should Yiddish be."
—Mina Bern



Mina Bern's dramatic entrance (above, 2004) as Sarah in Abraham Goldfaden's famous musical, *Akeydas Yitskhok* (The Binding of Isaac), at the JCC of Manhattan. She says, "Yiddish is such a rich language. As an actress I can convey sorrow, pain, fear and pleasure without having to look for a word." After a 2006 performance in New Rochelle, New York, the local paper reported that Bern "belted out her Yiddish standards like it was 1955 on the Lower East Side."

Reviewing the script for the forthcoming film *Lift* (left, 2006).





Beyle Gottesman, 86,

folkartist, poet and songwriter, in front of her house in the Bronx, which has served for generations as a center for Yiddish intelligentsia. She composed the hauntingly beautiful Yiddish song "*Harbstild*" ("Autumn"), among many other works that have become classics of modern Yiddish music. She received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts in 2005, was inducted into the People's Hall of Fame in New York City, and was recently honored at New York's 92nd Street Y. Among her recent projects is a newly-released CD (under the name Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman) of children's songs in Yiddish, "*Fli Mayn Flish-lang!*" ("Fly, Fly My Kite!"). (Photo, 2005)

"The battle between Yiddish and Hebrew really began with Herzl. Such distinctions pulled apart even the best of families: my uncle, a Zionist and formidable Hebraist, went to Eretz Yisroel, where he worked in the swamps, contracted tuberculosis and malaria and died; my father remained a staunch Yiddishist, was imprisoned under Communism and killed by the Russians. We have a family tradition to die young for our identity." —Beyle Gottesman

My *zayde* seemed like the only Jew in Detroit who wore a black hat and coat all the time, was very religious and spoke Yiddish. Friends made fun of him, and I felt ashamed. My former mother-in-law didn't want my ex-husband to marry me, because to her my family represented everything she wanted to rid herself of. Detroit was middle America in the 1950s and there were many more interesting histories than ours, as well as cultures and art to explore. No one there was particularly interested in Yiddish, so why would I be?

I've spent the last three years working on what will be a larger project in film and photography and history (watch for more in *Lilith's* pages) immersed in what remains of the Yiddish culture in New York. It's *more* than the vast archive preserved at YIVO, Harvard, the Congress for Yiddish Culture, the Folksbiene Theater and the National Yiddish Book Center. I discovered an incredible world filled with great thinkers, brilliant, dazzling and talented women and men. A *lot* of women, respected for their achievements, stars of literature and theater and film and so much more. Art and literature in the Yiddish genre is about, not separate from, everyday life. These women performers and writers taught me that Yiddish has a unique flair for expression, filled with nuances that no other language can express.

Their works epitomize all that I've longed to feel, but haven't always dared to. Then, I didn't want to be reminded. Now, I don't want to forget.

Shifra Lerer, 92, is the first Argentinean Yiddish star to have won an international following, and she has helped bring tango to the Folksbeine Yiddish Theater. Lerer has played Broadway and appeared in seven films, including Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry*. Along with Mina Bern, she was honored on November 20, 2006 by the Congress for Jewish Culture. (Photo, 2004)





Claire Barry is the surviving half of the glam Barry Sisters, stars of the Ed Sullivan Show. When they started to sing as girls, their mother used to say "Do it for Mama." They were among the first Jewish artists allowed to tour the Soviet Union, and they performed for Israeli troops during the Yom Kippur War. The Barry Sisters popularized a genre known as "Yiddish Swing" and "*Bei Mir Bist Du Sheyn*," one of their signature tunes, was a Top 40 hit for years. Esta Lubin Saltzman says, "Their harmony was unreal. The most beautiful you have ever heard." (Photo, 2006)

Phyllis Burke has sung in many languages, and appeared on Broadway in "Golden Land." Yiddish, she says, allows her to connect to an entire Jewish musical and historical legacy. She has also found Yiddish music especially useful in her professional social work, where she would put her face close to her elderly patients' and sing in Yiddish, causing them to "just come alive" and proving that the life of a Yiddish singer has grit as well as glamour. (Photo, 2006)



Bel Kaufman, 95.

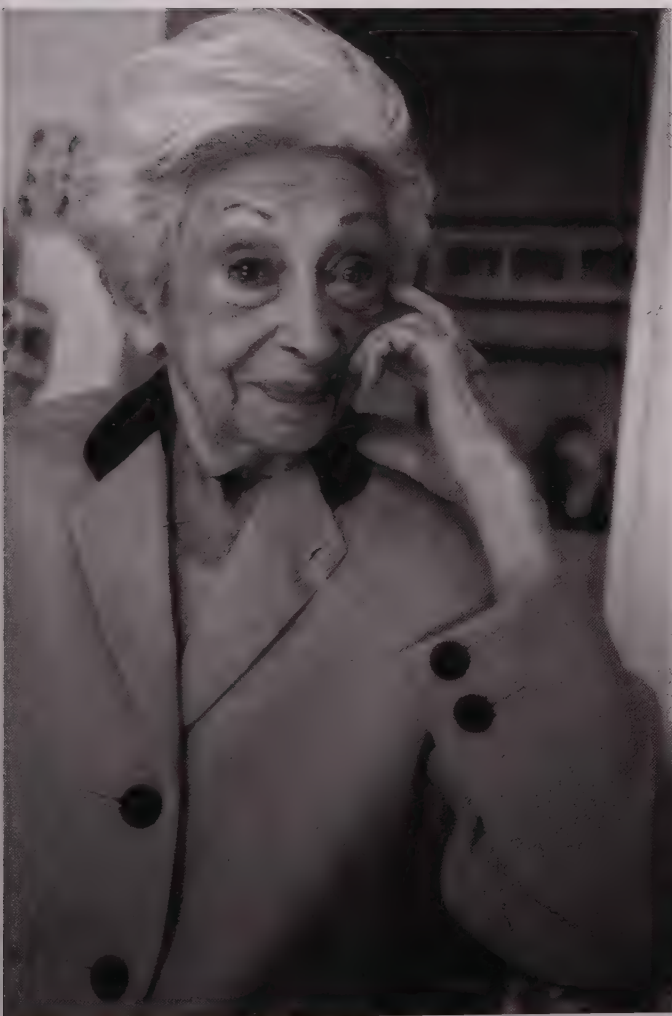
granddaughter of the iconic Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem, wrote the 1965 bestselling novel *Up the Down Staircase*. She is an honorary chair of the Yiddish Studies faculty at Columbia University and was recognized by the Folksbiene Theater last year for her special contributions to Jewish culture. (Photo, 2006).



"One Saturday night a lady walked up to the box office and asked to buy tickets. The clerk said, Sorry, Madame, we are sold out. She replied, You don't understand. Four of us just took a long trip from the Bronx and we want to see the show. When he explained, Sorry, Madame, there is not a single ticket left, the woman walked out with a hump and said, No wonder Yiddish theater is dying." —Esta Lubin Saltzman

Esta Lubin Saltzman,

92, has been performing on the Yiddish stage for eight decades. During that time she performed as an ingenue with many of the Yiddish-theater greats, including Molly Picon (from whom she sometimes stole the show, at least according to one reviewer). In between shows, she would often pass the time listening to the Barry Sisters harmonize in their dressing room. She was a member of the prestigious Hebrew Actors' Union, the first such union in America. (Photo, 2004)



Sylvia's Spoon

by Michelle Brafman

*Winner of the
2006 Lilith fiction contest*



I steal a sterling silver baby spoon from my great Aunt Sylvia, while her body, barely cold, rests under a blanket of disheveled earth at the Beth Shalom cemetery. I do it in the kitchen, on impulse, while I'm looking for a teaspoon to stir my chamomile, just before my family begins reciting the mourner's kaddish in my aunt's living room. *Yisgadal ve yiskadash shema rabah, amen.*

My mother, loud and tone-deaf, can't even finish the prayer she's so weepy. We all are. She enters the kitchen to empty a fistful of dirty Kleenex into the trash, and I slide the spoon further into my pocket. I run my fingers around the tiny bowl and up along the skinny handle to the tip which is inscribed with the Hebrew letter hey. My name, Hannah, begins with a *hey*; this piece of flatware is my destiny. Besides, finders keepers.

I imagine that this spoon has survived pogroms and a long passage to Ellis Island, and I want to siphon its fortitude for my baby. I'm thirteen weeks pregnant, my new record for not miscarrying. Every morning I pray from *The Jewish Women's Guide to Fertility*, a book I would have snickered at two years ago. I suffer the indignity of progesterone suppositories—the added hormones make me throw up in my office trashcan—and I avoid foods I ate and clothes I wore while unsuccessfully carrying babies number one and two. I take pregnancy yoga classes to manage the stress from keeping it all straight.

My husband Danny can't win. If he's enthusiastic about the baby, I tell him not to jinx anything. If he's cautious, I interrogate him—a man of reason, not instinct—about his “true gut” on this pregnancy. My parents are no help; my mother worries so much that I end up comforting her, and my father changes the subject, but then e-mails me the cell phone numbers of his old med school buddies who specialize in fertility. Most of my friends are reveling in their fecundity. I cling to this spoon and the hope that my dead aunt is taking care of my baby, somewhere out there in the ether.

On the flight home from the funeral, I watch Milwaukee disappear into a puff of clouds and sip lukewarm orange juice out of a plastic cup. I like the way my aunt's spoon burrows into my thigh. Aunt Sylvia used to laugh at my knock-knock jokes and hang my art projects on her fridge and look the other way when I pinched pieces of meringue from the top of her icebox cake. I feel more hopeful than I have in weeks.

I kiss Danny's cheek, breathing in the familiar scent of Dial soap. “Let's name our baby Sylvia.” As soon as these words leave my lips, I want them back.

Danny gives me the wan smile that he's cultivated. “Let's just see what happens.” He strokes my arm.

“Oh God, Danny. Don't tell me that you're too superstitious to name the baby,” I snort, when in fact I cling to superstition like Velcro. I lean my head back and close my eyes, signaling that the conversation is over. My hand rests on my mildly distended belly while I daydream about

my little Sylvia. It will be a warm spring day, and she'll sit on my lap licking vanilla icing off of a cupcake, wiping her sticky fingers on my knees. She'll smell like baby sweat and sugar. I'll pull her tangle of ringlets—auburn like Danny's—from her eyes. I can practically hear her giggle. Fear forms in the back of my throat and swells into my esophagus like a hive, as it always does when I allow myself to hope that this baby will survive.

Later that night, shortly after eleven, I feel like someone is yanking my abdomen shut with a drawstring. Fuck. Shit. Fuck. Cramps turn into nausea, and I beg my baby to stay put. Danny pages the obstetrician while I stumble to the bathroom, clutching the spoon for dear life, not mine. Talisman in hand, I negotiate with God. No deal. Before the sun rises, I deliver my baby.

I rest my head against the side of the toilet and gaze at the emptied contents of my womb. The acrid odor of my waste mingles with the smell of urine and Tilex, nearly making me gag. I try to capture the cluster of blood and tissue with my aunt's spoon, but my efforts only loosen the clump into a spray of red and greenish gray that dissolves into the bowl. I let my fingers linger in the cold, red water, before I close the lid. Aunt Sylvia appears to me: the slightly bulging gray eyes and the sad smile pasted on soft pink lips and the sound of her lip.

Danny mops my forehead with a washcloth. I stand up slowly and rinse off the spoon, turning the faucet on full blast in a futile attempt to drown out the sound of the flushing toilet. My knees buckle.

One week later, Danny lounges on our bed—as he has done for each of the past six nights—staring slack-jawed at ESPN. Who gives a damn about the Cardinals?

I forage around our pantry for Tylenol. We're out of cereal. A jar of my friend Maggie's homemade raspberry jam (her annual holiday gift) sits next to a bottle of capers; the contrast of the green and the red reminds me that I did get to see my actual baby, instead of just a black sonogramscreen, devoid of the pulsing light the size of a thumbtack. We disposed of those babies during tidy office visits followed by written instructions to call if there was too much blood. There's always too much blood.

I dump four tablespoons of jam and eight capers together in a bowl and then retrieve the spoon from my purse; I use it to mix and then ladle the concoction into a small ziplock baggie. Sylvia.

By the time I return to Danny, he's sprawled out on our bed, his face bathed in the blue TV light, his mile-long eyelashes—blonde at the tips—fanning the tender skin beneath his eyes. He looks like he's eleven years old. A fresh soul. The phone calls and foot rubs aren't working, but at least he's trying. I can't muster up the energy to comfort him. I

don't want to. Before the miscarriages, I would have cheered him up by taking him bowling or seducing him or renting a Monty Python movie; we'd sit in front of the television drinking cheap beer and eating potato chips, laughing—Danny at John Cleese's ridiculousness, me at Danny—until we could barely breathe.

It's hot for June, and the breeze from the air conditioning vent chills my toes. I pull my T-shirt over my head and crawl into bed beside him, cradling his smooth back against my breasts. He mumbles something and reaches over to grab my hip. I move slightly, and he rolls over and runs his hands through my dirty hair. We don't make love—too raw, too soon. Sleep finds me clutching the baggie of raspberry jam and capers and Aunt Sylvia's spoon.

The next morning, I cancel my 9 AM staff meeting. I was scheduled to fly to Boston the day after I miscarried, so now the whole office knows what happened, and I'm no longer the den mother of our "little non-profit that could," my old hiding place from this relentless pregnancy angst. My co-workers now treat me like I've got a raging case of pink eye, except for Valerie, the stripper turned receptionist who has a six-year-old son. The morning I came back to work, she greeted me with a homemade loaf of banana bread. I almost cried.

I pull on an old pair of shorts from my college days—University of Michigan—and walk two blocks up M Street to a coffee house that doesn't sell anything ending with the letters "ccino." Danny wants to move to Bethesda, but the thought of living in the suburbs without children thoroughly depresses me.

A cell-phone-blabbing mother spills her latte on me; the hot liquid burns my thigh. "Watch where you're going," her brusque words crack me open like a walnut. Instead of crying, I find a table and rub my iced tea against my leg.

A man with kind eyes and a thumb ring sits down next to me and asks to borrow a pen. I reach into my backpack and the baggie falls to the table. We both examine what looks as though a sandwich has orphaned a glob of jelly and perhaps a few pumpkins seeds.

"Must have been a hell of a sandwich." He points at the plastic bag and laughs nervously.

"Keep it." I slide a pen at him with more force than I mean and then snatch the baggie from the table. These days, I go nowhere without my spoon and baggie; they make me feel close to my Sylvias. Totally weird I know, but they comfort me when nobody else can. One miscarriage and you get "75% of women miscarry during their first pregnancy." With the second, it's "my sister/cousin/electrologist had two, you'll be fine." And three begets "I know of a fertility clinic out in Gaithersburg."

The day folds into itself; at five, I'm smothering a chicken breast in olive oil when Danny calls, "I have to show a house tonight, sweetie. Can I pick up some Ben and Jerry's on the way home?" He sounds both anxious and relieved to take a night off from our grief. I call my mom. Just because.

"Whatcha doin'?" I try to sound like that plucky girl who beat the entire sixth grade class in an arm-wrestling tournament, who trotted off to Mali to run an AIDS program, and not the hormonal casualty that I am.

"Thinking about you, honey."

"No need." I muster up some of my old bravado.

"We spent today at Aunt Sylvia's house, cleaning her things."

One miscarriage and you get "75% of women miscarry during their first pregnancy." With the second, it's "my sister/cousin/electrologist had two, you'll be fine." And three begets "I know of a fertility clinic out in Gaithersburg."

My cheeks turn warm and I feel like I did when I was sixteen years old and my father almost found a fifth of Southern Comfort I stashed in an old suitcase. "Am I in trouble?"

"Why?"

"I swiped Aunt Sylvia's baby spoon," I blurt out in a moment of lapsed impulse control.

"Not the one from your great-grandma Hannah from Minsk?" My mother sounds both amused and alarmed; she's a fourth generation German Jew and often disparages her mother-in-law's Eastern European ways. "Your Grandma Goldie went on and on about that spoon when her dementia got bad."

My heart quickens as my mother tells me about some feud between my grandmother and my aunt over this spoon. She's fuzzy about the details but my grandmother was mad as hell that barren Sylvia kept their mother's baby spoon for herself instead of letting her sister use it for her babies.

I sleep fitfully. I dream that a pregnant Aunt Sylvia eats Neapolitan ice cream with the baby spoon, while Grandma Goldie sits on her favorite chair and watches a toddler with braids stand alone in a grassy knoll playing "Captain, May I?" Raspberries stain the girl's white overalls and her eyes bulge slightly. These images smash into each other like an MTV music video.

The next morning, I'm shampooing my hair when I retrieve my memory of the spoon. I was five when my parents let my brother Eric and me stay with Aunt Sylvia while they went to the Cayman Islands. She ran us bubble baths and wrapped us in towels that she had warmed in the dryer. Cocooned in our bathrobes, we curled up on the sofa bed and ate Jiffy Pop. She packed Hostess Ding Dongs in our lunchboxes, and I watched her polish silver until it sparkled. Only after she finished the candlesticks and kiddush cups, did she shine the baby spoon.

On the last day of our stay, I asked her if I could feed my doll Wendy with the spoon, which even as a child, I knew she didn't want me to touch. I also knew that she couldn't say no to me. She nodded toward the spoon, and I grabbed it greedily.

"Here, here, my little Wendy." I placed the spoon gingerly against her plastic mouth. "My little baby, my baby." I rocked the doll back and forth. I could feel my aunt watching me, so I hammed it up. "Mommy loves you. Mommy loves you." On some level, I knew I was making my aunt feel like I did when my brother waved his extended bedtime or gum-chewing privileges in my face. My aunt never polished her silver in front of me again.

In an effort to rinse this memory out of my hair, I stand under the shower until the water turns cold. I e-mail my boss to tell him that I'm taking a few more days off and spend the morning Googling old lovers. I only want to know if they've had children.

I pop my old wedding video into the deck. Danny breaks the glass, and then we kiss as we practiced: affectionate but not too much tongue. I fast forward to Aunt Sylvia who is fingering a stray rose petal when the camera zooms in on her. She fumbles with the microphone and holds it up to her lips, recently touched up with a fresh coat of lipstick. Pink Velvet. Revlon. Funny the things you remember. Her large eyes dart around the room, and she clears her throat several times. "Like someone pulled them off the top of a cake, this bride and groom," she giggles nervously and continues, "my wish for my Hannah is that she know every kind of *nachas* life has to offer." Her laughter fades.

I replay the clip over and over. My aunt is smiling, but her eyes are slightly watery. How could I have missed this? Maybe she suspected that I wasn't going to be able to have children. Maybe she is mourning Uncle Irving. No, he was an asshole; this has to be about me. What possessed me to swipe a fertility totem from a barren woman? How could I have stolen my aunt's birthright?

Tears are forming somewhere in my skull. To stave off another tidal wave of grief, I drive around the Beltway thinking about my aunt.

"Call me Aunt Sylvia, all the kids do," she told Danny seven years ago, when I presented him to her as a dry run for the later round of family introductions. She motioned to a wall of framed photos of my grandmother's progeny, while I poked around her fridge for a Pepsi. She loved to brag about me, "her bat mitzvah"..."voice like an angel"..."captain of the volleyball team."

I joined my aunt and Danny in the dining room, where

they were laughing at one of his puns. And when I recited the blessings over the candles later that night, I surprised myself with my prayer that my walls would never be filled with photos of other people's children.

I pack toiletries, two shirts and a peasant-skirt—my jeans don't fit because ten days post-miscarriage, I'm still sporting a sanitary napkin the size of a diaper between my thighs—into a duffel bag and drive to the airport. I fly Midwest Express to Milwaukee because the seats are roomy and they serve meals with real linen napkins.

A blond woman in her sixties offers me two chocolate chip cookies. "I'm Lois. You got family in Milwaukee?"

"I'm visiting a relative."

"You got kids?" She adjusts her Coke bottle glasses. "Those career women forget to have kids until it's too late and then that's that."

"I have a baby girl." I entertain a confrontation fantasy with Lois on my way to the bathroom: Lois. I've lost a baby. I named her Sylvia and I'm carrying a replica of the fetus made out of raspberry jam and capers in my backpack. Would you like to see? The tiny lavatory smells like asparagus pee and diesel.

I rent a Ford Taurus, whose air conditioning dries out my contact lenses, and drive to my Aunt Sylvia's empty, colonial house with a "For Sale" sign planted on the front lawn. I sneak into the backyard and sit cross-legged on her overgrown grass. A ladybug crawls up my big toe. Four raspberries cling to an anemic looking bush, so I pick them. I open my baggie—the plastic forms a crease in the aging jelly concoction, which smells vinegary and sweet—and drop in the fruit.

The grass cools my feet as I walk back to the car. I'll call Danny after I make my next stop. I excavate a piece of licorice from the bottom of my purse and run it back and forth between my teeth until it turns into a skinny thread, while I concentrate on finding my way to the cemetery.

Seven white tulips mark Aunt Sylvia's grave. Sylvia Savitz Seigel. What a dreadful name for a woman with a lisp. The thought makes me smile.

I remove my sandals, and let my soles sink into the velvety soil. The dirt next to my aunt's grave yields easily, while I dig a hole with my fingers. I retrieve the baggie from my purse and place it into the crevice. I scoop small chunks of dirt over the plastic with my aunt's spoon, and then I raise its warm handle to my lips and kiss the Hebrew letter *hey*. I drop the heirloom into the earth. A warm breeze tickles me, and I hear a whisper, my whisper. *Yisgadal ve yiskadash sh'may rabah. Amen.* ■

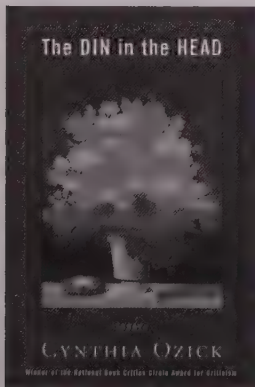
Michelle Brafman won the 2006 F. Scott Fitzgerald Short Story Contest for her story "Harvard Man." An award-winning documentary filmmaker, she lives in Glen Echo, Maryland with her husband and two children.

Paula Koz ("Spinach, Parsley and Mushroom Salad," page 34) is the illustrator of Shlemiel Crooks, a finalist in the 2006 Koret International Book Awards.

Dara Horn on Cynthia Ozick: What's Worth Knowing, and What Isn't

If you had to name the most brilliant literary thinker in America, **Cynthia Ozick** wouldn't be a bad pick. But in her new collection of essays, *The Din in the Head* (Houghton Mifflin, \$24), that brilliance is distilled into one salient skill which has become an American taboo: distinguishing between what is worth knowing and what is not.

In an astonishing essay about Susan Sontag, Ozick blames Sontag's elevation of taste above all other critical criteria as a major cause of the destruction of the American literary tradition. Reflecting on Sontag's dismissal of distinctions between high and low culture, Ozick insists that "it is still possible to separate high from low, the enduring from the ephemeral; even to aver that intellect itself (and the ethical life as well) requires the making of distinctions." This argument for acute judgment applies not only to art, but also to moral choices. In the collection's most strident essay, "Highbrow Blues," she reminds us that "a department of English is not the same as a Marxist tutorial. A rap CD is not the same as academic scholarship. A suicide bomber who blows up a pizzeria crowded with baby carriages is not a nation-builder."



But what makes this collection rise above mere complaint is Ozick's application of her own distinction-making talents to the

blurred line between biography and art. Most of the essays here are monographs on figures as disparate as Henry James and Gershom Scholem. Nearly all begin with portraits of crucial moments in these individual lives, written so that the reader is utterly seduced. (Scholem's father, for instance, responded to his son's Zionism by writing him a letter disowning him—and having the letter hand-delivered to the family breakfast table.) Yet the fascination of these essays lies in how they dissect artist from work, revealing our latent lust for fame that makes us believe that the person, rather than the person's achievement, is the radiance at hand.

One essay describes Sylvia Plath's private journals, which actually describes the poet picking her nose, and smashes the mythology that attributes Plath's power to her life rather than her talent. As Ozick puts it, "To look for the poems in the life...is not merely a tedium; it is a fool's errand." The collection's most stunning essay is about Helen Keller: Ozick considers the vivid visual imagery in Keller's writings an artist's achievement, one that reveals the power of the imagination. Perhaps the most haunting essay here is an elegy for Lionel Trilling, the mid-century intellectual giant, whose notebooks reveal his disappointment that he did not become a famous novelist.

One senses Ozick's own struggles with critical acclaim that has not always translated into celebrity. In the title essay, Ozick speaks of the din in her own head, punctuated by "shame and ambition and anger and vanity and wishing." The implication, perhaps, is that if American culture had not deteriorated, Ozick's own fame would far outstrip Danielle Steele's. But even here, Ozick's idea is universal: her book reveals that as possessed as one may be by the passion to create, the desire for fame truly eats the artist alive.

For the Jewish reader, *The Din in the*

Head provides more fodder for debate. An essay here, "Tradition and (or versus) the Jewish Writer," contends that traditional Jewish literature is by nature didactic, making it antithetical to the novel, whose obligations are only to story and language—and

In "Highbrow Blues," she reminds us, "a rap CD is not the same as academic scholarship."

thereby making the idea of a "Jewish novelist" an oxymoron. A fair argument, and expressive of every writer's dread of labels that might limit her imaginative freedom. In her essay on Lionel Trilling, Ozick quotes Trilling's claim that "no writer in English...has added a micromillimeter to his stature by 'realizing his Jewishness'." Noting Trilling's humiliating 1950s battle for tenure at Columbia, Ozick concludes that Trilling "could not have imagined that he would come to be remembered largely, if not chiefly, as Columbia's first Jew." One wonders if Ozick might already imagine herself being remembered, chiefly, for being precisely what she hoped not to be.

But to look for the writer in the work would be a fool's errand. Instead, we have the book itself, and what emerges is nothing less than an understanding of how to recognize artistic worth. And no definition of the deserving could be as powerful as Ozick's: "[O]ne must reserve one's respect for writers who do not remain ignorant of history...who do not choose to run after trivia, who recognize that ideas are emotions, and that emotions are ideas; and that this is what we mean when we speak of the insights of art."

Dara Horn is the award-winning author of the novels In the Image and The World to Come.

Honest and Happy?

Imagine a book about books. Imagine reading about reading. And then you will begin to appreciate Rachel Kadish's new novel, *Tolstoy Lied* (Houghton Mifflin, \$24). Kadish's story is narrated by Tracy Farber—Jewish, single, thirtysomething, and a professor of American literature whose views on love stem more from her reading than from her life experience. In her academic life, Tracy is struggling to prove a thesis that becomes personally relevant as well: can a story, *her* story, have an ending that's "both honest and happy"? Was Tolstoy accurate when he wrote that "all happy families are alike"—or can happiness be as interesting as unhappiness?



It is Tracy's relationship with her new boyfriend George that puts this thesis to the test. Unlike Tracy, who is quite sure of her identity, George is struggling to define himself, independent of the strictures of his fundamentalist Christian family. At first, their relationship progresses smoothly and joyously—until certain residual effects of George's upbringing begin to tear at her connection to him.

As a feminist who had thrived as single woman, Tracy is forced to consider what she wants from love against a panoply of successful and unsuccessful relationships—those of her friends but also, in a narrative flourish, of all her fellow New Yorkers and even of all of American literature. Meanwhile, as her tenure hearing looms, the political machinations of her colleagues in the English department compel her to re-examine her professional life, especially her secret project on happy endings. Kadish skillfully weaves all these threads together in a climax that hinges on the truth of Tolstoy's famous proclama-

tion. It is the agenda of Kadish as much as Tracy to prove Tolstoy wrong, but first Tracy has to rediscover herself beneath all the -isms and academic theories that had always buttressed her sense of self.

The strengths and weaknesses of Kadish's ideas-centered approach are clear from the beginning of the novel. The reader learns who Tracy is, for example, in a long introduction in which she explains herself and her contented solitude in a style better suited for her academic lectures. Not long after, Tracy declares that George could be "the one"—but all the reader has seen of their togetherness are a few symbolic moments of awkwardness, confession, and some intimacy. The effect is as intense as it is distancing; the reader, all at once, learns everything about Tracy and George, but doesn't connect to them emotionally or root for them as a couple. But as the plot gains momentum, the many layers of meaning with which Kadish shades everything and the well-executed grounding of this novel in the theories of American literature make the story far more powerful than the narrative itself would suggest. The ideas win out over the plot in the end, but taken together they make for a deeply enriching reading experience that, surprisingly, teaches us as much about how to read as about how to love.

Tammy Hepps is a software developer living in New York.

So Much of a Good Thing?

Maya Laor, the protagonist of **Tammar Stein's** deeply moving debut novel, *Light Years* (Knopf, \$15.95) is not your typical college freshman, and *Light Years* is not your typical young adult novel. Maya sets herself apart from her new classmates at the University of Virginia in every way—she is foreign; she is older, having served in the Israeli army before college; and she is carrying a burden of sorrow and guilt that she clutches to herself like a security blanket.

In alternating chapters, Maya tells the story of her life in Virginia and of the life she had known in Israel. Mayá, we soon learn, left Tel Aviv after her boyfriend

Dov was killed by a suicide bomber in a downtown café, and in her life in Virginia she tries desperately to separate herself from this tragedy. But the narrative reaches further into Maya's past, to the story of her entering the Israeli army, where she met Dov; of her leaving the comfort of her family home in Haifa for an army post in Tel Aviv; of her dream, even before Dov's death, to study abroad. Despite Maya's desire to leave Israel, the depiction of Israeli culture in this story is warm and realistic, honest about the hardships but also evocative of the special beauty of life in Israel. Maya, in Virginia, is homesick for her friends and family in Haifa, and struggles to acclimate to her new environment: "Israel never got much rain. It seemed like it got less and less each year. I associated the sound of rain—dripping from gutters and branches, plopping into puddles—with good things, good news. Though it was slightly disconcerting to have so much of a good thing now."



In adjusting to her life in Virginia, Maya's greatest difficulty is overcoming her guilt. Because of a previous encounter with the bomber, Maya holds herself responsible for Dov's death, and has to forgive herself before she can truly move on. This bit of plotting is one of the book's few missteps—survivor guilt would have been sufficient to drive Maya's need to run, without introducing this complication. Nonetheless, Maya's world—her emotions, her fears, her grief—captivate the reader. The book shies away from political pronouncements; it is a beautiful telling of the story of one Israeli, and a realistic picture of a young woman's life in contemporary Israel.

Rabel Lerner is a book editor in New York.

Old World Crashes into New

Reading **Kadya Molodowsky's** newly translated collection of stories, *A House with Seven Windows*, (Syracuse University Press, \$19.95) is like spending an afternoon poring over someone else's photo albums, so vivid and exact are Molodowsky's portraits of her contemporaries. She describes an angry housewife as looking like a wet hen shaking water from her feathers, and a panicked father of the bride with a face "like an old, wilted cabbage leaf." Short and to the point, these verbal snapshots focus on events that reveal her characters' psychological makeup—a marriage breaks up over a fur coat, a groom replaces his bride six

weeks before the wedding, a day is ruined over a cold cup of coffee.

In these 57 stories, first published 50 years ago in New York City and now meticulously translated and annotated by **Leah Schoolnik**, Molodowsky depicts an old world crashing into the walls of modernity as she hopscotches through the Yiddish-speaking communities of the last century. A proud man deflates as his wife becomes the higher wage earner; a wife is enraged as her husband closes the shop for a week to sit shiva for his father; on the eve of Passover, a cabinet of holy books in the living room is replaced by a glass display case filled with knick knacks. Frequently, a story will begin in a shtetl and end in Brighton Beach or Jerusalem: teenage lovers kept apart by their families in Europe are reunited in

Los Angeles after twenty-five years and three marriages. A shoemaker from Pshitik marvels at his son, an Israeli officer. The stories range from petty jealousies fought as epic battles (no slight is too small for two countrymen competing for the presidency of their community group) to heroic acts of kindness (a newly rich woman saves a family, who once rejected her, from bankruptcy).

Molodowsky perfectly depicts the quiet and not so quiet dignity of the hard working immigrant: parents don't speak in public lest they embarrass their daughter, a great aunt complains incessantly while generously taking in refugees from the DP camps. A tale about a man who builds an empire fueled by a grudge after his boss refuses to sit next to him at the theater reveals the outsider's heightened sensitivity to class and position.

Several of the tales chronicle a post-Holocaust Yiddish-speaking world crushed by the enormity of its loss, none more poignantly than "Gone....," the story of an American man whose greatest pleasure is traveling to his former shtetl with a large suitcase bursting with gifts and a wallet full of money to donate. After the war, he discovers that the entire town is destroyed and with it his reason for living.

With so much of this vibrant world now gone, the only way to revisit it is through its literature. Like the house in its title story, *A House with Seven Windows* is a treasured inheritance, now available to a new generation through this translation.

Caraid O'Brien is a three-time recipient of a new play commission from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture for her translations of Yiddish plays. www.cafepress.com/yiddishplays

"During the period in the late 1970s, I knew who among my friends had already seen me wearing a yarmulke out of my house and who had not. One day, a longtime friend, a woman several years older than I whom I saw over a meal two or three times a year, called me and asked me to breakfast. We were to meet at a corner on upper Broadway in Manhattan. I decided to wear my yarmulke. I felt self-conscious. She knew I was interested in Judaism, but wearing a yarmulke, outside, on a weekday, in the middle of New York City, was, for me, quite odd.

Moments before I reached the corner, I quickly took off the yarmulke and stuffed it into my pocket, just in time for her not to see me. I got scared. I chickened out. Even though I felt inside I was a Jew who was being pulled toward and inspired by traditional Jewish observance and that the yarmulke was a tool I could use to help me stay conscious of my spiritual work as a Jew, I apparently wasn't ready to tell the world.

At breakfast, my friend said, "I have something to tell you, Arthur. I'm a lesbian." I went home that day thinking she was brave enough to come out of her closet, but I was still a Marrano, a hidden Jew. From that day on, I've worn my yarmulke full time and have done so to this day."

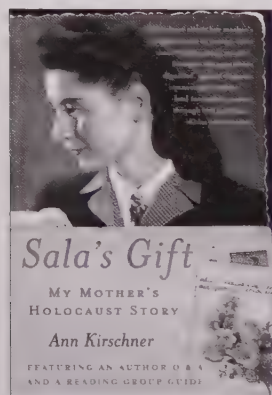
from On the Road with Rabbi Steinsaltz by Arthur Kurzweil

Letters Hoarded for a Lifetime

Ann Kirschner takes us into a world of determination and resilience in *Sala's Gift: My Mother's Holocaust Story* (Free Press, \$26). Her mother, Sala Garncarz, survived five years in seven different labor camps, and managed to save a cache of letters and postcards written by 80 different people. These letters form the basis for this magnificent account.

Such precious documents lend an

immediacy and power to Ann Kirschner's book, making it unique among personal accounts of survival. Kirschner writes: "Sala's letters are drops of time, spontaneous outpourings rendered with the shapelessness of real life, their emotions raw and unfiltered." The author fills in the political and historical background to the little-known Nazi enslavement of those young Jewish men and women who were sent to the Polish region of Eastern Upper Silesia, adjoining Germany, to work in factories or construction projects belonging to German industrialists. The work was grueling and the conditions unimaginable; nonetheless, unlike in the concentration camps, a percentage of these Jews were permitted to remain alive as long as they could continue to work. They were even allowed to write and receive a limited amount of censored mail.



Sala's large, Orthodox family lived in a one-room apartment in the town of Sosnowiec, home to 28,000 Jews. They write to Sala of their hunger and their hope despite the deteriorating conditions. On March 28, 1942, Sala's sister Raizel writes: "We haven't sent you any matzos...but we're not going to have any matzos either.... Remember, don't worry, everything is fine with us ...we talk about having Yom Kippur on Passover. Remember, don't cry, don't cry!" Later her sister Laya Dina writes of the last mass deportation. The word "wedding" serves as a code word for a roundup. "August 28, 1942. To begin with, I want you to know that my husband, David, and all of the children are home. It's been such a wedding: everyone has been ordered to go, small, grey, old and young, the poor and the rich...."

We follow Sala through camp after camp, where we get to know her friends and protectors, including the American

soldier who pledges his love to her. Sala marries this man and comes to the United States in 1946. She never speaks of her wartime life until 1991, when she hands a shoe box filled with mementos to her daughter and begins, finally, to talk.

Sala's story, filled with love and hope, was also featured in "Sala's Letters," a widely-reviewed exhibition at the New York Public Library in the spring of 2006. With this book, Ann Kirschner and her mother Sala have given us a gift of historical value and deeply personal meaning.

Rachel Josefowitz Siegel co-edited Jewish Mothers Tell Their Stories, as well as two more anthologies written by contemporary Jewish women. She is a retired feminist psychotherapist.

Unidentified Body, Identity Crisis

The title of **A.B. Yehoshua's** latest novel, *A Woman in Jerusalem*, (Harcourt, translated by **Hillel Halkin**, \$25) suggests the beginning of its plot: a woman in her late 40s dies of a suicide bombing in a Jerusalem market, and lies unidentified in a hospital morgue for days. When a journalist discovers a pay stub in her purse, the victim becomes the only character in the book to have a name: Yulia Ragayev. (All others are known only by what they do or by their relationship to the narrator, first known as the human resources manager, and later as the emissary.) In due course, other key biographical facts emerge: Yulia was a non-Jewish engineer from the former Soviet Union who lived in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, and worked as a cleaning woman on the night shift in a large bakery.

None of the women (or the men) in this richly symbolic novel are what they first appear to be. Yehoshua tells us, for example, that Yulia is "in perfect condition," according to the French beret-wearing morgue lab technician. "Believe me, she looks like a sleeping angel...The only visible damage was a few small puncture wounds in her hands and feet and a scratch on her skull." Whose sins has this "Tatar-eyed" beauty died for? Was the bombing the thing that killed Yulia, or was there some other cause? Will her death somehow save the masses of nameless characters that surround her?

Eventually, we learn more about the dual mission of the human resources manager. The owner of the bakery—whose business is bustling because of the political and economic situation (we're informed that people eat more bread when they can't afford other things or can't cross the border to buy food)—sends the manager on a no-expenses-spared mission to save the company's humanity in the wake of accusations soon to be released in a weekly tabloid.

While the human resources manager at first takes on the mission only at the threat of losing his job, within the first few days, he begins to feel a deeper drive for carrying out the mission fully: he finds himself desperately wanting to understand Yulia by delving into how she lived, whom she loved, and where she was from. Yet as much as he chases Yulia's shadows to gain some measure of intimacy with her inner life, he can't bring himself to look at her actual body.

The human resources manager has similar issues in his other relationships. In his hometown of Jerusalem, he's surrounded by women who don't cut him

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any slack—a secretary who takes over the investigation, a mother who questions his motives, an inflexible ex limiting visits with his timid teenaged daughter. Perhaps it's no wonder he frequents bars to find women to love, or finds himself consumed by his mission—which leads him ultimately to travel with Yulia's coffin to her ancestral homeland to ensure a proper burial. Here, the human resources manager experiences demonic dreams that lead to a releasing of his old ideas about identity and responsibility. In the end, *A Woman in Jerusalem* makes readers reconsider their own notions of who “the other” is and where they rightfully belong.

Yael Flusberg is a writer, nonprofit coach and consultant, and yoga teacher based in Washington, DC.

“Everything that can/ leaves the earth”

Israeli poet **Agi Mishol**'s first collection in English, *Look There*, (Graywolf Press, \$14) offers a vision of Israel that both speaks to and resists the images that appear regularly on the news. In her poem “Olive Tree,” Mishol writes of a road junction with a planted tree that is likely uprooted from a Palestinian farm bordering on an Israeli settlement. The original Hebrew verb *kheesoof* used to describe the tree's removal, as translator **Lisa Katz** explains in her introduction, calls to mind a verb from Israeli military speak often used on the news to mean “cleared away.” In the English version, Katz makes do with the word “shafted,” but the potency of the original comes through,

as it does throughout Katz's translation in this luminous collection.

Mishol's poetry is full of unexpected wit, and even in the darker poems, there are moments of humor and delight. In the long poem “Nocturne,” Mishol writes “Not for nothing I stand here in the evening/ bent over the sink/ manning my station/ singing to the distance:/ *row your boat*/ because everything that can/ leaves the earth:/ chimney smoke/ prayer/ jumps for joy.” That singing over the sink, that mix of delight and thoughtful meditation, makes Mishol's book a welcome antidote to the relentless news of bloodshed and destruction, whether in the Middle East or elsewhere.



Trees and songs figure into the work of Israeli poet **Yona Wallach** as well, but not as much as lovers, floods, and women with nothing on under their dresses. Brilliantly translated by **Linda Stern Zisquit**, *Let the Words* (Sheep Meadow Press, \$17.95) includes poems from Wallach's six books published during her lifetime and a collection that appeared after her death from breast cancer in 1985. The poet's linguistic experiments with gender and sexual convention make for startling reading

in 2006—one can only imagine the impact they made when Wallach first began publishing in the male-dominated literary world of the early 1960s.

Wallach plays with personae both male and female, often with riveting results, as in the poem “Strawberries.” The gender of the speaker in the poem is not revealed until the last line. First, Wallach lists a number of requests for a lover to “sell me strawberries/ tell me in a sweet light voice/ strawberries strawberries/ who wants strawberries...” and ends with the unexpected request for the “you” of the poem to lower herself “directly on my prick.” Wallach is fearless in the range of voices and tones she assumes in her poems, and the risks she takes make for rewarding, startling reading. In the poem, “When You Come,” Wallach writes, “bring me out in an ambulance/ to the future.” In these lyrical translations of her work, her voice comes through like a siren.

The poetry of **Linda Stern Zisquit** is tamer than the poems she translates by Wallach. Zisquit's most recent book, *The Face in the Window* (Sheep Meadow Press, \$12.95), explores her relationships with her family in the United States, where she was born, and with the family life she has made in Israel. The central section of Zisquit's book is a moving series of poems about her aging mother and the period of mourning that follows her mother's death. The series ends with an unexpected poem on sex and secrecy that recalls Wallach's work. “I've invited them all in here,” Zisquit writes, addressing her mother, “the ones you suspected I slept with/ and a few I kept out of view.”

Other careful moments of confession recur throughout Zisquit's new collection and make her book a fascinating companion to Wallach's unchecked poems of transgression. Compared to Wallach, Zisquit's own poems are less wedded to risk-taking than to the daily reality of family life. However, within that daily reality, Zisquit searches for that which is quietly suggestive though unseen—like the rounded back she describes in the poem “Calcium” under which “a whole life's hidden.”

“Postfeminism: Boys Like It” revealed an image of feminism and feminists that was still loaded down with some very familiar, very unattractive baggage. The term was (and still is) an insult to the legacy of feminism, an eye-rolling suggestion that we need to get over it and move on, already. But postfeminism can only exist in a postsexist world, and we're not there by a long shot.”

Andi Zeisler and Lisa Jervis, in the introduction to Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine

Idra Novey's chapbook The Next Country was published by the Poetry Society of America. Her translations of Brazilian poet Paulo Henriques Britto received a PEN Translation Fund Award.

A Different Middle East Family History

The younger we are, the easier it is to push to the margins of our consciousness a surprisingly elementary concept: cold women are merely grown-up young women. It is, perhaps, our way of distancing ourselves from our mothers' and grandmothers' choices, struggles, and disappointments—and a way of rationalizing our own.

As a young wife, mother and college instructor, **Jean Said Makdisi** initially sees a gaping divide between the balancing act of her quotidian life and the lived experiences of her mother and grandmother. In her new book *Teta, Mother, and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women* (W.W. Norton, \$25.95), she writes, for example, that her loving relationship with her grandmother—"teta," in Arabic—is marked by "the patronizing notion that she would not, could not possibly understand my anguish as a modern woman because she had been so safely ensconced in a carefree, though boring and limited, domestic existence."

The author, in her exhaustive study of the lives of her mother and grandmother, ultimately overthrows many of her own received ideas about her foremothers, and, perhaps, the Western woman reader's received ideas about counterparts in the Arab world.

Teta, Mother, and Me plays out against the backdrop of some of the most defining moments in Middle East history: the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of the State of Israel, the Suez Crisis, and the Lebanese Civil War. Makdisi, a Jerusalem-born Palestinian Christian, grew up middle-class in Cairo, where her family settled after Israel declared its independence in 1948. She lived in Washington and, later, Beirut, where she remained throughout the tumultuous 15-year war. In telling her story, the author weaves mundane but often lively tales of schoolwork, housework and childrearing with more solemn ones of war and dislocation over the course of more than 100 years.

This 404-page tome is less about politics than it is about viewing womanhood over time. Yet the realpolitik of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a recurring, and entirely one-sided, role in this book. "In 1948 the heart of our family was torn out,

and the centre of our existence was broken," writes Makdisi, who is a sister of the late Palestinian activist and literary theorist, Edward Said. "Most of all, though we have lived well and done well, and accomplished much, though we have many deep friendships throughout the world, since 1948 we have been outsiders—not only my parents but their children, and I fear their children's children as well."

The book concludes with a message that transcends cultures and generations: "We must negotiate the nooks and crannies of our own history, understand our past, ground ourselves firmly in it, and then move consciously toward a modernity of our own deliberate making."

Gabrielle Birkner is a writer in New York.

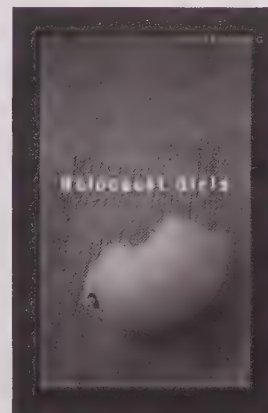
Holocaust Girls

History, Memory & Other Obsessions

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"Anyone who gets meditative around the High Holy Days, wondering exactly what it means to be a contemporary American and a Jew, will find a caring companion in Chicago-based journalist S.L. Wisenberg. . . . The strength of this collection is not so much in the answers Wisenberg provides, but in the questions she raises."—*Forward*

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What about "closure?"

I want to kick people who use that word. It conveys an incredible lack of understanding. Are people going to be graded on grief? What is "closure" after the death of a child? It's not the flu or chicken pox; you don't get better. It's a permanent pain. It lasts until your last breath.

How do you experience your other children's *simchas*?

A parent who has lost a child experiences wonderful joy, but never total joy. A part of you is gone; you are never again fully anywhere. I remember Aron had a way, when he got excited, of rubbing his hands together and running around in circles—an intense expression of being in love with life. I used to feel that, too. I'd feel exactly that. But I will never feel that way again. A bereaved parent has drunk too deeply at the well of life's fragility. We know terror.

My relationship with Aron doesn't change. But when I look at his friends and

what they're doing in their lives—this feels so shocking. At the funeral, when we were choosing pallbearers, I remember thinking that Aron's friends' parents would be thinking about other aisles, wedding aisles. The pain is always there. It changes in that you can breathe, but just a little.

So you still work full-time, and you have now spent over 10 years with ASIRT. Is there a point when you will want to pull back from this commitment, where your work with ASIRT will be more draining than sustaining?

It is always draining, and it is always sustaining, and it is always my job. When the last child has died and all the rest are safe, then I'll stop working with ASIRT. It is what I have to do. I have to do it in my role as a teacher, in my role as a human being, in my role as Aron's mother.

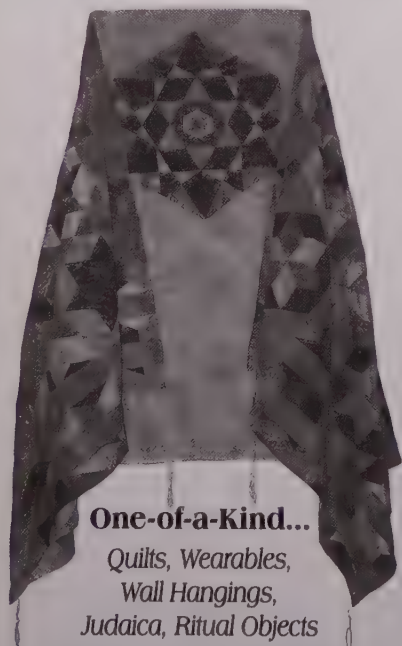
More than a million people die on the roads of the world every year, and over 50 million people are life-alteringly injured. Road deaths among military personnel—these are young people, these are mothers'

children—are a prime cause of fatalities. Every day, as many people die from road accidents as died on 9/11. ASIRT's work has led to the UN passing resolutions for safety; we have a caucus in Congress. Road fatalities in developing countries are projected to become the second most common cause of death by 2020 unless action is taken—the World Health Organization and the World Bank are being responsive to that.

When Aron died he was two weeks away from graduation, from becoming a physician. He wanted to relieve pain and save lives. But that role was taken from him. So I fulfill it for him. This is my job to do until I can't. ■

Lilith invites you to share your thoughts, responses and personal stories on our blog, lilithmagazine.blogspot.com. Please e-mail our moderator at melanie@lilith.org

From Louise Silk, author of *The Quilting Path*



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Request for Grant Proposals for courses in the Study of Secular Jewish History and Cultures

\$50,000 Awards annually for up to three years

The Center for Cultural Judaism invites applications for Posen Project grants for the study of secular Jewish history and cultures. Recipients will receive \$50,000 per year, for up to three years, towards new courses of study.

These grants are intended to encourage the study of secular Jewish history within already well-established university programs and departments of Jewish Studies, Philosophy, Literature, Sociology, Anthropology or other related disciplines. Grants will be awarded to support the teaching of two to four new courses per year, including a core course in the history, texts, philosophy and literature of secular Jewish history and cultures. Selections will be made on the basis of a strong proposed core course; an understanding of what it means to teach courses in Jewish secularism or secular Jewish culture; scholarship in this area; and the ability to integrate these courses over time and make them permanent.

Grants of up to \$50,000 each per year will be awarded for the 2007-2008 academic year. Upon review, these grants are renewable for up to two years.

Deadline: December 4, 2006

Background, Guidelines, Application, and Sample Syllabi are available at www.culturaljudaism.org

or by contacting Myrna Baron, Executive Director

The Center for Cultural Judaism

212-564-6711 x301 or myrna@culturaljudaism.org

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Guidelines and information are available at 212-564-6711 or www.culturaljudaism.org

Future Feminisms. A women's and gender studies conference—"Past Debates, Present Possibilities, and Future Feminisms"—celebrates 30 years of the National Women's Studies Association, June 28-July 1, 2007 in St. Charles, IL. The topics? Girls' Studies and Activism, Performing Feminisms, and Im/Migration and Mobility. Submit a proposal for a session if you're an academic, a women's center administrator, independent scholar, K-12 educator, artist, or activist. Send to Allison Kimmich, nwsaconference.org

See Jane [1] wants media types and parents to help increase the presence of female characters and reduce gender stereotyping in productions and books for children. Founder is actress Geena Davis (of "Commander in Chief"), who predicts that if young children "see everywhere a balance of active and complex male and female characters, girls and boys will grow up to empathize with and care more about each others' stories." www.seejane.org

Activist Strategies for Muslim Communities: Documenting Women's Rights Violations by Non-State Actors is an international manual for people investigating violence against women in the personal sphere: family members, neighbors, unknown persons, medical professionals, employers, religious leaders or educational institutions, as well as armed groups as a strategy of war. Published by Rights & Democracy in Canada, and Women Living Under Muslim Laws, it suggests methods of collecting evidence and outlines human rights concepts and principles useful in activism as well as other tools. It's intended for groups and individuals not well versed in legal matters. Free on www.dd-rd.ca

Haven Coalition is a network of volunteers who open their homes to low-income women forced to travel to New York City to obtain an abortion. Haven exists because abortion, while legal, is often not accessible. NYC clinics refer patients to Haven, whose hosts provide a safe place to sleep, transportation to and from the clinic, and a meal. Volunteers sign up for days to be "on call" and host no more than once a month. To host, you need to live in one of New York's 5 boroughs, have a place a guest can sleep and be willing to create the space in your life for this direct-action work. Contact havencoalition@yahoo.com

Make a Buzz—about reproductive health issues. A group of anonymous Jewish feminist activists invite you to join in. Here's what they're saying: "Protest The Global Gag Rule, reinstated by President Bush in 2001, prohibiting any international organization receiving US funds from performing abortions, providing education about reproductive choice, or referring clients to safe abortion providers. In 2004, the Food and Drug Administration rejected an application to allow over-the-counter sales of the morning-after pill. In making this decision, the organization ignored the recommendations of an independent advisory panel as well as the agency's own scientific review. Federal funding for abstinence-only education has more than doubled in recent years. In contrast, the government does not provide any support for comprehensive sexual health education. Over 80% of the abstinence-only curricula include false information about the effectiveness of contraceptives, the risks of abortion, and HIV transmission. Join a 'Bush's Christian agenda can't silence our moans, get your buzz on' campaign." www.jewishwomenwatching.com/actions/buzz/index.php

Elka Klein Memorial Travel Grant. Klein, who taught Sephardic culture, medieval history and Jewish studies at the University of Cincinnati, died last year. The Association for Jewish Studies and its Women's Caucus, and friends and colleagues, are establishing a fund in her memory to enable doctoral students to travel abroad to conduct historical research. For information about how to apply for a grant or to contribute to the fund contact Gail Labovitz, glabovitz@uj.edu

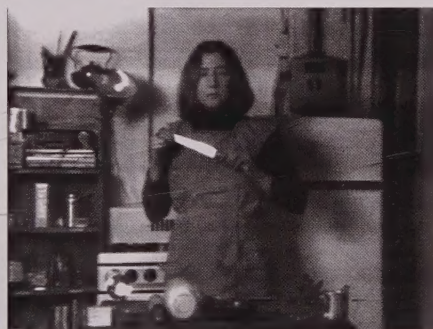
FiftyPlusConnect.com was launched in a spirit of adventure and out of the belief that "the best is always yet to come," according to Miriam Hipsh, founder of the site that broadens the goals of conventional dating sites. It helps you find, in addition to romance, a travel companion, an e-mail buddy or a partner for some activity you love. "We don't assume that the goal of every member is marriage."



Bullying is a girls' issue too. Lisa Sjostrom—author of *Bullyproof*, a curriculum for 4th and 5th graders and *Quit It!* a curriculum for lower grades published by the Stone Center of Wellesley College (helpingkidsthive.org)—recently brought the current thinking and expertise on meanness to Jewish day school communities in New York City, facilitated by Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project at the JCC in Manhattan. Ma'yan, now focusing its high beams on Jewish girls via its Koach Banot: Girl Power! initiative, offers information and advice and can introduce you to experts to help you bring a variety of interesting programs to your Jewish school. Call Ma'yan at 646-505-4432.

In the Arts

The Glass Ribbon Project. Artist Gary Rosenthal is teaming up with breast cancer support organizations and craft galleries throughout the United States to launch a community-based initiative featuring pink glass mosaics created by individuals affected by breast cancer. These inspirational "Strength Stones"—key chains, earrings, ornaments and bookmarks—to be completed by Rosenthal's studio in Kensington, MD, and handcrafted into inspirational art, will retail for \$20 each, with portions of the proceeds benefiting breast cancer support organizations. Many of the craft retailers will work with local community groups in glass-making activities. Find out more at www.glassribbon.com



1 Geena Davis in "Commander in Chief"

2 T Hirschl Mementos III by Tamar Hirschl. 3 I Am Struck by a Soldier by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz. From image: "September 1942, I went back to the house to get clothes for my family when a soldier appeared and struck me with his rifle for not raising my hands quickly." 4 Joseph Was Seventeen by Chana Cromer. 5 Still from Kitchen Semiotics by Martha Rosler. 6 Jewish visitors at the entrance to Grossinger's in the Catskills, c. 1950.

Kitchen Semiotics (1975) [5] is a feminist parody, of a cooking show in which filmmaker Martha Rosler says "an anti Julia Child replaces the domesticated 'meaning' of tools with a lexicon of rage and frustration." Jessica Shokrian's "Ameh Jhan" ("Dear Aunt") (2001) accompanies the filmmaker's aunt, an Iranian immigrant to Los Angeles shopping for and preparing *kofteh* (meatballs). Along with Boaz Arad's "Gefilte Fish" (2005) and an excerpt from Laura Kronenberg, David Schweitzer and Frank Cavastani's 1973 "Abbie (Hoffman) Making Gefilte Fish" these films comprise the opening exhibit of the Jewish Museum's new media center, Food for Thought: A Video Sampler. www.thejewishmuseum.org

The Other Promised Land [6]

Vacationing, Identity and the Jewish American Dream. By the 1890s, a summer vacation was a normal expectation for many working-class Jews. An appealing exhibit reconstructs such legendary venues as Atlantic City, the Catskills, Florida, New York and Israel, demonstrating the values, tastes and dreams of American Jews who—along with their summer fun—experienced discrimination and the effects of assimilation. Curated by Jewish Museum of Maryland's Melissa Martens, the show runs through 2007 in Baltimore, and travels on. www.jewishmuseummd.org

compiled by Naomi Danis, Naomi@Lilith.org

Tamar Hirschl: Cultural Alarm [2] an art installation by this Zagreb-born New York-based Israeli artist, tries to awaken viewers to the dangers of human and environmental destruction and what she sees as the unnatural separation of cultures, religions and societies. Hirschl's murals on the scale of public billboards, her sculptures set in plexiglass aquariums, and her paper collages are on view through January 30 at the Hebrew Union College Museum in New York. www.huc.edu

Through the Eye of the Needle: Fabric Art of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz [3] Trained as a dressmaker but untrained in art, Krinitz, at the age of 50, in 1977, began a series of 36 fabric pictures which tell in detail the story of her survival during the Holocaust. This exhibit originated at the American Visionary Art Museum with art on loan from artandremembrance.org. You can see it through February 11, 2007 at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley CA. www.magnes.org

The biblical Joseph [4] was known as a dreamer and a spoiled child. He was hated by his elder brothers, suffered many years of servitude and grew through adversity and struggle—not unlike his own father Jacob, who created a coat of many colors for him. Israeli artist Chana Cromer's interpretations of the Joseph story in fabric and paint, silkscreen and stitchery are on view through March 25 at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York. www.yumuseum.org



Unterzakhn

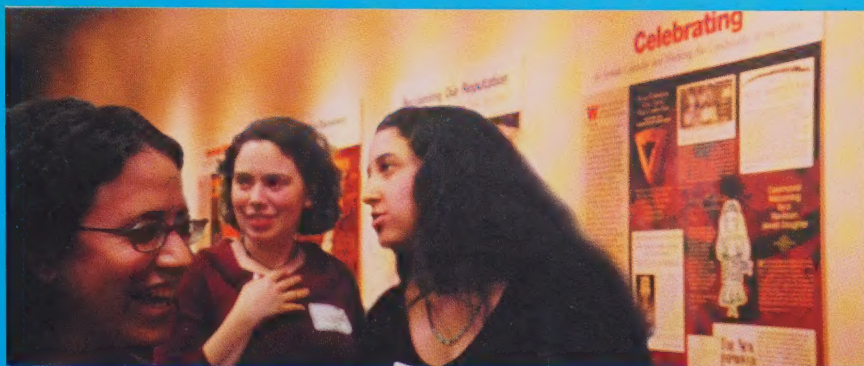
from a work-in-progress
by Leela Corman

This is a page from my book in progress, *Unterzakhn* (Yiddish for “Underthings”). The book follows the lives of a pair of twin sisters, Fanya and Esther, growing up in the tenements of the Lower East Side at the turn of the last century. In this scene, Fanya and her mother have come upon their neighbor, Sadie Gold, bleeding to death in the street due to a botched attempt at a DIY abortion. Fanya has been dispatched to find Bronia, “The Lady Doctor”, a shadowy underground figure who treats “women’s troubles” in secret. This is the opening scene of the book, and in it, Fanya is radicalized. She will be

forever changed by what she witnesses, and she will become Bronia’s apprentice and later, the neighborhood abortionist and birth control agitator. Esther, meanwhile, strikes out on a seemingly different path, becoming the ultimate vaudeville diva and mankiller. While it’s never possible to point to any one reason or inspiration for a piece of work, right now I feel a great sense of urgency to talk about abortion and birth control, and the gruesome results of not having a choice. ■

Leela Corman’s work can be found at www.glittercannon.com

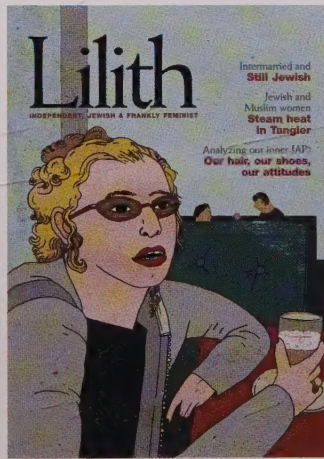
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To bring the exhibition to your community, campus or JCC, and to find out how Lilith will help you create local programs to complement the show, email info@Lilith.org or call 1-888-2-LILITH. To see more samples of this exhibition, visit www.Lilith.org



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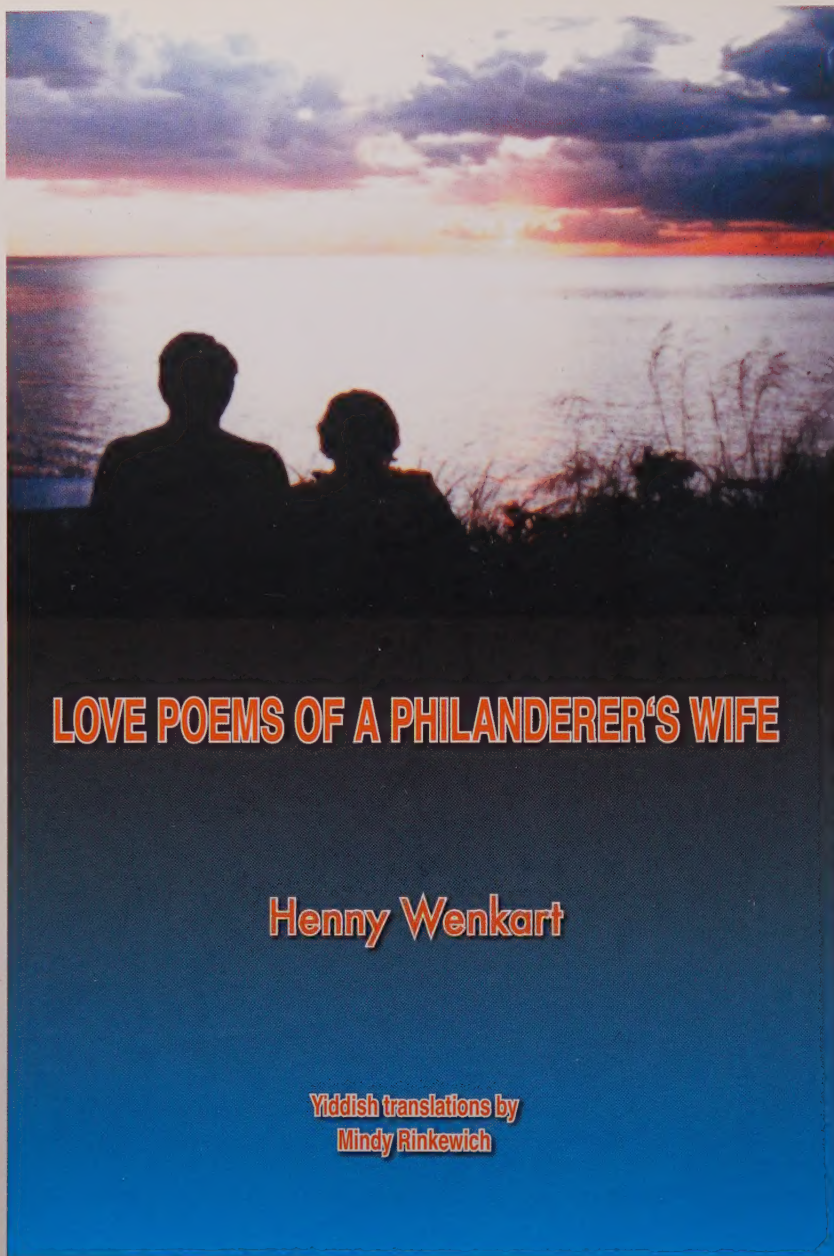
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